

CAMBRIDGE TEAPE LECTURES - 2005

*For*  
A CHRISTIAN  
PHILOSOPHY  
*From*  
INDIA



K.P. ALEAZ



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# **FOR A CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY FROM INDIA**

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**K.P. ALEAZ**



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**FOR A CHRISTIAN  
PHILOSOPHY FROM INDIA  
CAMBRIDGE TEAPE LECTURES, 2005**

Author: K.P. Aleaz

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*Dedicated*  
*To*  
All those who promote  
An East – West  
Dialogue

## Preface

A special thanks to the Cambridge-Delhi Christian Partnership, for inviting me to deliver the Teape Lectures in the Universities of Cambridge, Bristol, Birmingham and Edinburgh in November, 2005. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the generous hospitality in the U.K. of the following wonderful people: The Revd. Dr. John Sweet, The Revd. Jonathan Collis, The Revd. Dr. Jomles Lawron (Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer respectively of the Cambridge- Delhi Christian Partnership), Prof. Julius Lipner, Dr. David Gosling, Dr. Douglas Hedley, Canon Michael Roberts, Canon Andrew Wingate, Dr. Brian Stanley, Dr. Israel Selvanayagam, Prof. Gowin D'Costa, The Revd. Margeret S. Macgregor, Dr. Jack Thompson and Dr. Robin H.S. Boyd. The theme I chose for the lectures was 'Towards a Christian Philosophy through Indian Philosophy' and the first part of this book is a presentation of the lectures. It is my contention that Indian Philosophy can provide a direction for an Indian Christian Philosophy, both in its method and content as there is an integral relation between reason and revelation in it, as it involves the totality of life and its transformation, and not just human rationality as in the case of Western philosophy. The method of an Indian Christian Philosophy is in terms of the *pramāṇas* (valid sources of knowledge) of Indian epistemology, taking into consideration the significance of hermeneutics and a viable theology of religions. The six *pramāṇas* are: perception, inference, scripture, comparison, postulation and non-cognition. These are discovered as *pramāṇas* of Indian Christian epistemology. The content of an Indian Christian philosophy can be in terms of a metaphysics or theory of reality, implying the total range of reals, i.e. human person, Nature, and what is beyond these i.e. God, to which is added Jesus Christ as well. It is demonstrated in this first part that there is a possibility of the emergence of a creative Indian Christian philosophy from within Indian philosophy, especially Advaita Vedānta.

The second part presents some of my recent papers. It is suggested that as Indian Christians, our very understanding and interpretation of Bible and theology can be in terms of the *Śabda* method. We can uphold a spirituality of Pluralism for which Sri Ramakrishna, *Syādvāda* of Jainism, Thomas Christians, S.K. George and Manilal C. Parekh provide the necessary encouragement. Dalit-Advaita theologies converge in the life and work of both Swami Vivekananda and Sri Narayana Guru. Advaita provides the possibility for an integral liberation in which all the three i.e. God, creation and humans are included. Indian Christians living in the midst of people of other faiths have opportunities to break the boundaries that separate them from others, ecclesiologically as well as theologically.

The third and final part provides a few of my recent devotional addresses and sermons. Cross is presented as the total affirmation of God through the total self-sacrifice of Jesus. It is a working principle of life to overthrow evil through the power of redemptive suffering love for all. If love is the being of God and if love is the life of Jesus on earth, we cannot but be love as well. The kingdom of God we experience as God's future in our present and to it God's gracious invitation is open to all, especially the outcasts. Transformation of human life and the whole creation in Eastern Christian thought is in terms of an apophatic theology, deification, eucharistic worship and Jesus Prayer.

My thanks are due to Rev. Dr. T. M. Philip of Christava Sahitya Samity, who graciously encouraged me and readily undertook the responsibility to publish this work.

Without the help and support of Bonita, my wife and Gargi our daughter, I could not have undertaken this venture and completed it. As ever, I am thankful to them.

I also take this opportunity to thank the Bishop's College community for their constant encouragement.

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PART ONE  
**TEAPE LECTURES, 2005**



# I

## INTRODUCTION

**A**mong diverse disciplines, philosophy, even in the Western sense of the term, seems to be the one that stands nearest to theology. Theology, in terms of faith, expounds convictions about God, human person, and the world. Philosophy is also more or less focused upon the same themes. While Western philosophy did this not on the basis of faith but reason and ordinary experience, Indian philosophy did this more or less on the basis of faith in the transformation of life in terms of the Ultimate, faith in the *pramāṇas* (valid sources of knowledge) which included *Śabda* (Scripture) that was interpreted in a non-dogmatic way.<sup>1</sup> Therefore while in the West philosophy and theology have affinity as well as difference with one another, in India they are integrally related.

In order to arrive at the distinctiveness of the integral relation that exists in India between religion/theology and philosophy, it would be appropriate to note the connection as well as the distinction between the two as existed and is existing in the West. There is no doubt that the mainstream of the Church's thinking has favoured the alliance with reason and therefore with philosophy; but simultaneously there was also a lively opposition between the two as well. This opposition has kept the relationship under critical scrutiny and fought against bad

forms of the relationship injurious to both theology and philosophy.<sup>2</sup> In the early days of the Church there were Fathers who advocated as well as opposed the alliance between theology and sympathetic philosophies; Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria for example belonged to the former group, while Tatian and Tertullian to the latter.<sup>3</sup> In the history of the allegiance between the two, there were periods when one partner overshadowed the other, depriving the other of its legitimate freedom. If in the medieval synthesis, theology was the dominant partner, in the great days of idealist philosophy the situation was reversed.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore whereas in the East the relation of philosophy and religion is generally so unproblematic that there is often no clear-cut distinction between the two, the situation in the West is not so simple. The mainstream of Western philosophy was closely involved with religious questions until the late 19<sup>th</sup> c. and there was no major conflict between the two.<sup>5</sup> The Greeks in general and Plato in particular pursued questions that are usually taken to be religious, such as the immortality of the soul, transmigration and the possibility of a future life or lives, and the existence of the godlike. Of course there was no emphasis on human relation to a personal deity as such. When philosophy joined hands with the Judeo-Christian tradition, it became almost indissolubly linked to theology. With that union arose the problem of reconciling philosophical thought with established dogma. For example the eternity of the world and transmigration of souls seemed incompatible with Christian dogma.<sup>6</sup>

When Descartes laid the foundation for knowledge in the thinking subject, i.e., in reason as opposed to faith, the possibility was created for the eventual parting of ways between philosophy and religion in the West. In the 19<sup>th</sup> c. this parting took place with such thinkers as Feuerbach, Marx, and, especially, Nietzsche, with his pronouncement that God is dead. Since that time, philosophers may or may not have religious concerns. For example the 20<sup>th</sup> c. movement labeled existentialism can be divided into two namely a theistic (Marcel,

Maritain) and an atheistic (Sartre, Camus) camp.<sup>7</sup> Also, there arose thinkers whom one could call religious but who have nothing to do with explicitly theological questions (Heidegger, Wittgenstein). There was also the group of thinkers who believed that religious questions are not the business of philosophy, the main function of which is to develop critical argument (Russell, Moore). Of course it is also true that we had a 20<sup>th</sup> c. theologian who sought to mediate between philosophy and religion in Paul Tillich.<sup>8</sup>

In the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> c. both theology and philosophy were determined to maintain their autonomy, while in the second half there were signs of hope for a better relation between the two disciplines. In the 20<sup>th</sup> c. we saw metaphysics falling into disrepute and new forms of philosophizing appeared. Philosophers did not any more construct all-embracing systems of metaphysics and the tendency became one of analysis rather than synthesis. The philosophical movements that belonged distinctively to the 20<sup>th</sup> c. stood off from metaphysics. Logical analysis became the central focus. Existentialism for example was analytic; what was analyzed was human existence. Some philosophers did indeed develop an ontology or philosophy of being, but it is claimed to rest on existential foundations and to be different from a metaphysic constructed by the speculative exercise of reason.<sup>9</sup> Post-Modernism again is not interested in a metaphysics. For it human self is constructed and relational. In it there is no superiority for scientific knowledge. Regarding theory of meaning it would hold that there can be no real other than the signifiers. There can be no metanarratives which can be used to make sense of everything.<sup>10</sup>

What are the gains of theology from its contacts with philosophy? John Macquarrie states:

Clearly, it is not taking over the substance of a metaphysical doctrine in order to mix this in with the content of revelation. The gains are formal in character, and have to do with the problems of structure, method, and expression. Thus the exchange with philosophy compels the theologian to seek clarity and coherence in the structure of his discipline; it provides him with carefully devised

methods which can be used in the investigation of theological problems; and it may provide him also with a vocabulary that is both precise and contemporary and fitted for the expression of what the theologian has to say.<sup>11</sup>

He presents the first division of Systematic Theology as Philosophical Theology. Philosophical theology roughly corresponds to the Natural Theology of earlier times. It differs from the old style natural theology in being descriptive rather than deductive. Also, the approach of philosophical theology is existential rather than rationalistic. Another distinction between the two is, philosophical theology is more fundamental in going to the very sources of religious conviction.<sup>12</sup> But at the same time it performs the same function of providing a link between secular thought and theology proper. Again there is difference between philosophical theology and philosophy of religion, as while the latter is a general and disinterested study of religion, the former belongs within the theological enterprise.<sup>13</sup>

‘Religious thought’ can be an expression used to include all serious reflections of a philosophical nature on the central theme of religion. ‘Religious thought’ can include ‘philosophy of religion’, understood as that branch of philosophy which concerns itself with interpreting and evaluating religion. It can also include philosophical theology, understood as that branch of theology which concerns itself with elucidating and examining the philosophical implications of a religious faith. In religious thought we can find exchanges of ideas between philosophers and theologians. The philosopher can find the expression of a truth in a religious dogma or even in a myth, while the theologians can welcome the conceptual apparatus of a philosophy for the explication of religious faith.<sup>14</sup>

Indian philosophy, compared to these Western developments and interpretations more or less constantly had its integral relation with religion and consequently can have an integral relation with theology as well. This makes the birth of an Indian Christian philosophy possible and easy. In the first lecture we look into the distinctive features of

Indian philosophy as well as the basic concerns of the Orthodox schools, before discussing the major Hindu-Christian interactions at the level of Indian philosophy. In the second lecture the focus of attention is on the method of an Indian Christian philosophy as emerging from Indian epistemology in terms of the *pramāṇas* (valid sources of knowledge). The significance of hermeneutics and a theology of religions in that emergence is also looked into. The third and final lecture attempts to indicate the content of a possible Indian Christian philosophy – Indian Christian metaphysics precisely - as emerging from Advaita Vedānta and as having affinity with Eastern Christian thought. God as unknowable as well as *Saccidānanda*, an interpretation of Jesus Christ going beyond the Atonement theories, an understanding of creation and human person are the topics covered in this lecture.

### Notes

1. Cf. K. P. Aleaz, *The Role of pramāṇas in Hindu-Christian Epistemology*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1991; John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, London: SCM, 1966, p.18.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. Joan Stambaugh, "Philosophy", *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. XI, ed. by Mircea Eliade, New York: Macmillan, 1987, p. 292.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 292-93.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 293.
8. *Ibid.*
9. John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, *Op. Cit.*, p.20.
10. Cf. M. M. Ross, "Towards a renewal of theology in India through post-modernism", *Indian Journal of Theology*, Vol. 42, No. 2, Sept. 2000, pp. 192-203; Graham Ward, "Post-modern Theology" in *The Modern Theologians. An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by David F. Ford, Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, pp. 585-601.
11. John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 21.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
14. John Macquarrie, *Twentieth-Century Religious Thought. The Frontiers of Philosophy and Theology, 1900-1980*, London: SCM Press, 1981, pp. 15-16.

## II

# A HINDU-CHRISTIAN MEETING AT THE LEVEL OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY TILL TODAY

**W**e shall limit our discussion here to basically three areas. First, some distinctive features of Indian philosophy shall be looked into. Secondly, the different schools of Indian philosophy are very briefly presented and finally an attempt will be made to locate some important Hindu-Christian interactions at the level of Indian philosophy that have taken place till today.

### 1. Some Distinctive Features of Indian Philosophy.

Two features of Indian philosophy are prominently distinctive and different as compared to Western philosophy. Number one, Indian philosophy is integrally related to Indian religions namely Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. Philosophy is an aspect, a prominent aspect, of religion in India<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, Indian Christian philosophy is also quite natural in the Indian context. Number two, scripture (*śabda*) is accepted as a valid source of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) in Indian epistemology, making thus the relation between reason and revelation integral to Indian philosophy<sup>2</sup>. Revelation/scripture of course is not dogmatically interpreted in India, which again can inspire and guide an Indian Christian interpretation of scripture.

In India, there exists an integral relation between religion and philosophy. The quest for Reality, which is the sphere of philosophy, is inseparably connected with Indian religious experience. The culmination of *vaidika-dharma* or religion developed from the Vedas is Vedānta, an important school of Indian philosophy. Hinduism accepts the authority of the Vedas and at the same time, it is not a dogmatic or ‘authoritarian’ religion; acceptance of the Vedas does not mean the slavery of reason. Scriptural interpretation has to be in terms of *upapatti* or intelligibility in the light of reasoning. This alliance of reason and revelation is responsible for the kinship of religion and philosophy in India. Philosophy in India in one sense is the pathway to religion and in another sense the culmination of religion because understanding and actualization of reality are two sides of the same coin and religion and philosophy always together perform these two functions. This integral relationship between religion and philosophy prevents philosophy from becoming barren, and religion from becoming blind. It would be interesting in this connection to note that in India, philosophy is called *darśana* which means vision/intuition, and religion, *mata* which means ‘what has been reflected upon’<sup>3</sup>. In Indian philosophy, Epistemology or theory of knowledge deals with the sources of valid knowledge (*pramāṇas*) and these point to the integral relationship between reason and revelation or in other words between philosophy and religion. While on the one hand the five *pramāṇas* perception, inference, comparison, postulation and non-cognition which constitute the realm of human rationality are always illumined by the Innermost Ātman, on the other, the other *pramāṇa* verbal testimony or scripture as revelation transcends all dogmatism<sup>4</sup>.

The term used for philosophy in India is *darśana*, which may be translated as vision or vision of Truth or Reality. The vision of Reality enlightens and transforms a person; he/she is able to reorient life in terms of that Reality. Realization of Truth enables to overcome ignorance and actualize liberation. Philosophy thus involves the totality of life and its transformation, and not just human rationality<sup>5</sup>. An

Epistemology or theory of knowledge, which enquires into the nature of human knowledge, how it develops and how far it is able to grasp reality, enables us to arrive at a Metaphysics, which discusses the general problems regarding reality i.e., human person, material world and what is beyond, many times designated as God. A desirable Metaphysics provides us with a sound Ethics. Ethics investigates the problem of morality, the standard of moral judgment, the highest goal of life etc. enabling us to realize Truth<sup>6</sup>.

All the systems regard philosophy as a practical necessity and cultivate it in order to understand how life can be best led. How a system serves the human ends (*puruṣārtha*) is the important issue. Indian philosophy wants to understand the source of problems of this world and how these can be best solved. It wants to understand the nature of the universe and the meaning of human life, in order to find out the means for overcoming life's miseries<sup>7</sup>. Also, all except the Cārvakas believe in an 'eternal moral order'. This is the faith in an order – a law that makes for regularity and righteousness; a law that works in the gods, the heavenly bodies and all creatures, differently called *apūrva*, *adrṣṭa* or *karma*. Faith in an 'eternal moral order' inspires optimism in us as there is room for free will and personal endeavour in such a conception. The universe is conceived as a moral stage by the different systems. Here all the living beings get the dress and the part that is fitting to them. They are supposed to act well to deserve well in future. Liberation is conceived as the highest goal of life. Ignorance is the cause of bondage and knowledge is necessary for liberation. Also, it is the conviction of the different schools of Indian philosophy that self-control (*samyama*) is needed to remove passions that obstruct concentration and good conduct, and continued meditation on truths learned is needed to remove deep-rooted false beliefs<sup>8</sup>.

Indian philosophy involves humans in a profound manner. It is an applied discipline and not a merely theoretical one because it aims at concrete tangible results. It is significant that the Upaniṣads and similar

texts often speak of *vidyāś* (pragmatic philosophical doctrines) rather than of *jñāna* (pure knowledge) and this again points to philosophy as an integral part of religion<sup>9</sup>. The main trends of Indian philosophy which deserve our special attention in the context of its integral relation to life in general and religious life in particular are pointed out as follows<sup>10</sup>: (a) its attempt to base philosophy on *all* aspects of experience and not simply on sense experience; (b) its practical insistence that philosophy is for *life* and must be lived in all its spheres, private, social and global; (c) its emphasis on the necessity of controlling the body and mind, the necessity of moral purity and meditation, to make philosophical truths effective in life; (d) its recognition of the fundamental unity of all beings and the consequent consciousness that our moral or religious duties are toward all; (e) its conviction that the Ultimate Reality manifests itself, or can be conceived in different ways, and consequently that there are divergent paths to perfection *any one* of which can be adopted in accordance with one's inner inclination; (f) its belief that material progress is necessary, but only as means to spiritual peace and perfection which is the ultimate aim of all.

## 2. The Different Schools of Indian Philosophy

Indian philosophy is more than Hindu philosophy. Schools which reject Vedic authority, the *nāstika* or Heterodox namely the Cārvaka or Materialist, the Bauddha and the Jaina are also part of it. Hence the scope for Indian Christian philosophy as a distinctive school within it. The Orthodox or *āstika*, the schools which accept Vedic authority are six namely Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta. Of these, the last two schools are directly based on the Vedic texts. While the Mīmāṃsā school emphasizes the ritualistic aspect of the Vedas i.e., the Brahmaṇas, the Vedānta focuses upon the speculative and meditative aspect of the Vedas, i.e., the Upaniṣads. The different schools interacted with one another and flourished together during many centuries and pursued parallel courses of growth<sup>11</sup>. The followers of each system *lived* that particular philosophy

and handed it down to succeeding generations of followers even up to the present day. These systems mutually influenced one another. It was by constant mutual criticism that the huge Indian philosophical literature has come into existence. Vedas and the Upaniṣads are directly or indirectly responsible for most of the philosophical speculations. In the Orthodox schools, next to these we find the Sūtra literature, presenting the gist of the system through brief statements. Then came commentaries on Sūtras, commentaries on commentaries as well as some independent works. Though the different schools were opposed to one another, a sort of harmony among them was also conceived by the Indian thinkers. The different schools were conceived as offering different paths for philosophical thinking and living to persons of different qualifications and temperaments (*adhikārabheda*)<sup>12</sup>.

The Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika<sup>13</sup> are allied systems and they have the same end in view i.e., liberation of the individual self. Regarding the conception of God and the liberation of the individual soul the Vaiśeṣika theory is the same as Nyāya. While the Nyāya admits four sources of valid knowledge namely perception, inference, comparison and testimony, the Vaiśeṣika recognizes only two namely perception and inference and reduces comparison and testimony to these two. According to Nyāya, the soul is a substance quite distinct from the mind and the body. It acquires the attribute of consciousness when it is related to any object through the senses. Consciousness is not an essential quality, but accidental which ceases to qualify the self in the state of liberation. It is ignorance of truth that impels the soul to act for good and bad ends and associate the soul to the world of sin and suffering, birth and death. Liberation means the absolute cessation of all pain and not pleasure or happiness, brought about by the right knowledge of reality. The Naiyāyikas prove the existence of God through several arguments. God created the world out of eternal atoms, space, time, ether, mind and souls<sup>14</sup>. The Vaiśeṣika system brings all objects of knowledge under seven Categories (*padārthas*) namely

substance, quality, action, generality, particularity, the relation of inherence and non-existence. A substance is the substratum of qualities and activities. The nine kinds of substances are earth, water, fire, air, ether, time, space, soul and mind. A quality is that which exists in a substance and they are twenty-four in number. An action is a movement which belongs to substances and there are five kinds of them. Generality is the common nature of a class. Particularity is the ground of the ultimate differences of things. Inherence is the permanent relation by which a whole is in its parts, a quality or an action is in a substance, the universal is in the particular. Non-existence stands for all negative facts<sup>15</sup>.

Sāṅkhya and Yoga<sup>16</sup> are again allied systems; if the former provides the theory, the latter is focusing on practice. They uphold a philosophy of dualistic realism. There are two ultimate realities, *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. *Puruṣa* is the soul as distinct from the body, senses, mind, intellect and ego, which are the evolutes of *prakṛti*. *Puruṣa*'s essence is consciousness; *prakṛti* is an eternal unconscious principle. *Prakṛti* is the ultimate cause of the world. *Prakṛti* evolves into twenty-four principles when associated with *puruṣa*. The three substantial elements which constitute *prakṛti* are the three *guṇas*, *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* respectively possessing the natures of goodness, activity and passivity. The individual soul or *puruṣa* due to ignorance confuses itself with the body, senses, mind, intellect and ego and this is bondage and the cause of suffering, while discriminative knowledge (*vivekajñāna*) is liberation<sup>17</sup>. Yoga<sup>18</sup> focuses on spiritual training in order to attain discriminative knowledge. Yoga consists in the cessation of all mental modifications (*cittavṛttinirodha*). There are eight steps in the practice of yoga (*yogāṅga*) namely restraint, moral culture, posture, breath-control, the withdrawal of the senses, attention, meditation and concentration. According to yoga, there must be a Supreme Being who is able to bring about the relation between *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* as per the *karma* (actions) of the individuals and that is God. In the view of Sāṅkhya, we need not admit God to explain the world; *prakṛti* is the

cause of the world. Some Sāṅkhya philosophers can admit God as the witness, but not the creator of the world.

The primary object of Mīmāṃsā School<sup>19</sup> was to defend and justify Vedic ritualism in terms of the authority of the Vedas. The validity of the Vedas is self-evident. The disinterested performance of the obligatory rites gradually destroys the karmas and brings about liberation after death. When one performs any ritual, there arises in the soul a potency (*apūrvā*), which produces in future the fruit of the action. The state of liberation is conceived in the early Mīmāṃsā as one of continuous bliss or heaven, but for later Mīmāṃsā it is only the elimination of suffering. Liberated soul has no consciousness. Mīmāṃsā does not believe in God or in the cycle of creation and dissolution. The Prabhakara school of Mīmāṃsā holds five sources of valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*) namely perception, inference, comparison, testimony and postulation. The Bhatta school adds one more *pramāṇa* to these five namely non-cognition and Advaita Vedānta accepts all these six along with the scriptural hermeneutical principles worked out by Mīmāṃsā. Vedānta like Mīmāṃsā is scripture centered. The system arises out of the Upaniṣads which is the culmination of the thought of the Vedas (*Vedānta*). The Upaniṣads speak of the unity of all existence, conceived as One Reality (*Sat*) or Ātman or Brahman. This Reality is Pure Consciousness and Bliss. Brhmasūtra systematized Upaniṣadic teachings and Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja wrote commentaries on it starting thereby the two main schools of Vedānta, Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita. For Advaita reality is non-dual. Brahman/Ātman is the Supreme Reality. Creation's reality is totally derived from Brahman/Ātman. Creation is only relatively real. Brahman/Ātman pervades, illumines and unifies all the levels and layers of human personality as well as the whole creation. And the experience of this intimate relation is liberation.<sup>20</sup> According to Rāmānuja though God is the only Reality, with in God exists as parts the different unconscious (*acit*) material objects as well as the many conscious souls (*cit*). They

form the body of God. Liberation is through devotion (*bhakti*) to God. The liberated soul is similar to God, but not identical.<sup>21</sup>

### **3. Some Hindu-Christian Inter-actions at the Level of Indian Philosophy**

Christian interactions with the six systems of Hindu philosophy have a long history of approximately one and a half centuries. Krishna Mohun Banerjea (1813-1885) and Nehemiah Nilkantha Sastri Goreh (1825-1895) were the pioneers to undertake such a step.<sup>22</sup> Though their approach was negative, they responded to all the six systems. The maximum Christian responses have been to the system of Vedānta.<sup>23</sup> The following is a brief account of the diverse interactions and their evaluation:

Nehemiah Goreh considered the Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika which are closely connected as the most reasonable of all when studied together their sūtras and the later interpretations because they acknowledge a God eternal and omnipotent.<sup>24</sup> Krishna Mohun's respect tilted toward Śaṅkara, though he did not agree with him.<sup>25</sup> His contention that according to Nyāya one has to get rid of both merit and demerit in order to escape transmigration and consequently it could not propound a system of ethics is not true.<sup>26</sup> Both Krishna Mohun and Goreh rejected as defective the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika contentions of the souls and atoms of the four elements as self-existent, God as only the efficient cause, and emancipation as total unconsciousness.<sup>27</sup> Their evaluation here may be considered as valid. The view point of both converged in rejecting the doctrine of the pre-existence of the soul. But the Hindu philosophical contention of the pre-existence of the soul need not be projected as defective provided we are able to understand the karma-saṁsāra doctrine as not denying free will and personal endeavour under the grace of God.<sup>28</sup>

John Vattanky is of the view that Nyāya in general and Navya-Nyāya in particular provides a philosophical foundation for a truly Indian Christian theology because the philosophical framework of

Navya-Nyāya can be easily detached from its typically Hindu religious presuppositions.<sup>29</sup> The primary theological implication of Nyāya theory of knowledge is that the absolute becomes the horizon of all knowledge and therefore also of all human activities. In Nyāya it is possible that from what we have known we could assert also what we have not known. Human intelligence has a capacity to rise above what is of immediate experience. Human intellect has infinite capacity to reach out to the ultimate.<sup>30</sup> Also, the Nyāya theory implies that human person cannot think except in the context of an Absolute. Nyāya epistemology hints at an understanding of human being in which God is pivotal. God enters into a profound relationship with humans at the transcendental level in terms of knowledge in consciousness. Human knowledge can transcend the empirical sphere. It is this vision of human beings whose destiny can be fully understood only in terms of the ultimate reality that is important and relevant in the context of theologizing.<sup>31</sup> Separating religion from philosophy and then projecting Indian philosophy as belong to the realm of pure reason in the context of Navya Nyāya would only be an isolated approach not acceptable to other schools of Indian philosophy where religion and philosophy as well as revelation and reason are integrally related.<sup>32</sup> This may be considered as the major limitation of John Vattanky's approach.

Against the Sāṅkhya, one point each is distinctive to Krishna Mohun Banerjea and Nehemiah Goreh. Krishna Mohun says that *prakṛti* as the equipoise of the three *guṇas* cannot be a substance, but only a relation and also this equipoise cannot have creative power as it would imply an excess of *rajas*. But we should note that *guṇa* in Sāṅkhya means a constituent element and not a quality.<sup>33</sup> Nehemiah Goreh's point is that the Sāṅkhya's view denies cognition, will, activity, happiness, and misery as qualities of the soul and holds them to be affections of the internal organ which is an evolute of *prakṛti*. This is only partially correct, as the Sāṅkhya never denies cognition for the soul.<sup>34</sup>

Both reject the atheism of Sāṅkhya. For Goreh, without God, believing in the distinction of virtue and vice would be meaningless. If Sāṅkhya cannot reconcile subject to motives and purposes with omnipotence in a creator, Krishna Mohun's answer is, the Supreme Being does not require an external motive for anything He/She does. We should note in this context that there were some theistic interpreters of the Sāṅkhya.<sup>35</sup>

The distinctiveness of Patañjali's Yoga philosophy as separation of matter from soul is not upheld by Christian thinkers. Rather they confuse yoga with union with God as diversely experienced in Vedāntic, Śaiva Siddhāntic and Śākta yogas, as well as experienced in the yogas of the Bhagavadgītā namely karma, bhakti and jñāna. For example, Abhishiktananda presented an explanation for yoga, which is a mixture of yoga philosophy, Śaktism and Advaitic experience.<sup>36</sup> Vandana continued the mixing up of yoga of Patañjali with other schools of yoga, conceiving it as a complete union with God.<sup>37</sup> The presentation of Thomas Manickam again confuses Patañjali's yoga which is separation of matter from soul, with spiritual union with God. His interpretation further that yoga is attuning of our life to the rhythm of Nature, the cosmic order as well as with God again may not be in line with Patanjali's thought, but only in line with Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga.<sup>38</sup> For Appasamy Pillai who was perhaps the first Christian to use yoga technique in Christian meditation also, yoga meant union with God, with the Holy Spirit that results in visions and a power and peace.<sup>39</sup> Thomas Matus prefers tāntric yoga because in his view it has a much more integral understanding of human nature and destiny as compared to Patañjali's yoga.<sup>40</sup> On the one hand, B. C. M. Mascarenhas accepts yoga as a supra-religious technique and on the other hand, in samādhi he can appreciate only the *savikalpa samprajñātha samādhi* as a Christian where the object of contemplation is a personal God.<sup>41</sup>

Against the atheism of Mīmāṃsā Krishna Mohun Banerjea's argument that Dharma or the Veda cannot stand without God is not

fair as there are the heterodox schools which hold on to their own dharma and scriptures. The argument that words of the Vedas are connected with eternal species and forms (*ākṛtis*) over against *vyakti* (individual) cannot be valid according to Krishna Mohun, because the question would arise how is it that the Vedas only allude to forms of such things as may have appeared in India down to a certain ascertainable period. The answer of Mīmāṃsā-Vedānta would be, *śabda* is particularized as per the *upādhi* of the *manas*.<sup>42</sup> If the Vedic gods are imaginary, Goreh asks the question how can we worship an unreal God and receive reward. We should note here that Mīmāṃsā ethics through ritualism has the perception of duty for duty's sake.<sup>43</sup> In the writings of Francis X. D'Sa, we get a fair enough analysis of the Mīmāṃsā interpretation of *śabda*. One only wonders why he is not creatively using the Mīmāṃsā insights in Biblical hermeneutics. Strangely enough, when it comes to Biblical hermeneutics his suggestion is to adopt the *dhvani* method of interpretation of the Kāvyaśāstra and the *śabda* method of interpretation is totally forgotten.<sup>44</sup>

Coming to the Indian philosophical school of Vedānta, Christian responses to it have been the maximum, Advaita Vedānta being the focus in most cases. Before coming to the Christian reflections on Advaita let us see briefly A. J. Appasamy's thoughts on Viśiṣṭsādvaita Vedānta of Rāmānuja as well as Ignatius Puthiadam's views on the Dvaita Vedānta of Madhva. Appasamy showed that Rāmānuja realized with certainty God is a personal being who loves us and to his grace we should surrender ourselves. God is the inner ruler (*antaryāmin*) of the universe and souls; out of love God becomes incarnate (*avatāra*) in order to satisfy the longing of the humans for God. Rāmānuja provided a philosophical formulation of the doctrine of *bhakti* (devotion). In the light of Ramanuja's thought, Appasamy has suggested a line along which Christology could be built up in India emphasizing the intimate communion between Christ and the believer. Jesus is the *Avatāra* of the whole Being of God for all times and he came to redeem the

sinners. Holy Spirit can be conceived as the *Antaryāmin*.<sup>45</sup> Puthiadam appreciates Madhva's conviction that Viṣṇu is only the *nimitta kāraṇa* (efficient cause) of the universe, that all finite beings are dependent on the Lord and dependence is the deepest relation of the finite to the infinite. He inter-relates the understanding of God of Madhva with that of Thomas Aquinas. If we consider the order of beings, God is the center for both Thomas and Madhva. For Thomas in and with and through everything, it is the being of God that is manifested. In Dvaita thought God is the greatest Being, the most perfect Being and the only free Being.<sup>46</sup>

While Krishna Mohun Banerjea has taken into consideration the historical development of thought within the Advaita tradition and situated Śaṅkara's view within that development in his presentation of Advaita Vedānta, Nehemiah Goreh has mainly taken into consideration only post-Śaṅkarite literature for the interpretation of Advaita. Through out Goreh's work, it is taken as a postulate that with the Vedantins, Brahman excepted, all is nihility. Advaita wishes to make out the soul to be Brahman, and the world to be false; whence it would follow that Brahman solely is true.<sup>47</sup> For the Vedantin ignorance is unreal only from the standpoint of true existence, it has apparent existence or practical existence. This position in the view of Goreh is self-contradictory because on the one hand it takes ignorance to be nothing at all and on the other, as having a little existence in it. Goreh would further hold that Brahman without qualities cannot be proved to exist and the soul being subject to ignorance cannot be one with the Supreme Brahman.<sup>48</sup> Krishna Mohun points out that pre-Śaṅkara Vedānta view that the universe is identical with Brahman amounts to material pantheism and the post-Śaṅkarite view that the universe is a mere idea, a non-entity amounts to spiritual pantheism. Śaṅkara's position is somewhere in between. Sometimes Śaṅkara holds that the universe is a fiction of ignorance and sometimes he has argued for the reality of the external world, thus creating an amount of self-contradiction. Pantheism, whether material or spiritual is practical

atheism.<sup>49</sup> Also, illusory theory can amount to there is no real evil, no possibility of law or duty, no discrimination between sin and virtue. Nehemiah Goreh agrees.<sup>50</sup> For both Goreh and Banerjea, when it comes to an interpretation of the reality of creation, advaita position is ambiguous. But there are other Christian interpreters like the present author who find no ambiguity in Śaṅkara's position. Brahman in Śaṅkara's thought is both the efficient (*nimitta*) and material or reality providing (*upādāna*) cause (*kāraṇa*) of the universe. Creation is the effect (*kāryam*), extrinsic denominator (*upādhi*) and the name and form (*nāmarūpa*) of Brahman. The Ātman pervades, illumines and unifies the whole world, the whole of history and the entire human personality. Māyā or avidyā does not mean that names and forms are illusion; but it only means that to identify name and form as Brahman, as a parallel Absolute, is what is illusion. In other words Śaṅkara does not propagate either material pantheism or spiritual pantheism; rather his thought stands for true theism. If advaita represents true theism, the negative criticism that it ignores morality, the discrimination between sin and virtue, made by both Goreh and Banerjea, again cannot stand. Nirguṇa Brahman is the most personal Being Saccidānanda, and Goreh's contention that He/She cannot be the illuminator of the internal organ is a misunderstanding. The *jīvātman* or individual soul is a reflection of the Supreme Ātman in human constitution and the experience of this integral jīva-Brahman relation is liberation, which Nehemiah Goreh should have taken note of.<sup>51</sup>

Some later Christian thinkers also have rejected Advaita Vedānta. For example, P. D. Devanandan thought that the Hindu Vedāntic theology cannot give an ideological basis for the new Indian anthropology; only the revelation of God in Jesus can.<sup>52</sup> In the view of Surjit Singh the values at stake in Advaita Vedānta are of personality, of history and of time, which can be restored by recapturing the New Testament significance of the person and work of Christ.<sup>53</sup> There is another group of Christian thinkers who reinterpret Advaita Vedānta to make it 'Christian'. P. Johanns wanted to reconcile the different

schools of Vedānta in Thomism in order to arrive at Christ. Śaṅkara's understanding of God gives the foundation for this, while the superstructure has to be built by other Vedantins. *Creatio ex nihilo* is the doctrine which Johannis suggests for the further improvement of Śaṅkara's thought.<sup>54</sup> Mark Sunder Rao conceived the divine-human union in the incarnation as hypostatic or ontological, where as the fallen humanity is capable of only *unio mystica*, union at the level of the Spirit.<sup>55</sup> According to Abhishiktananda the monistic Hindu Saccidānanda should be transformed into the Trinitarian experience of Being as communion. We can awake to the Father Sat, through the representative Chit, Jesus Christ. There was also an inner Abhishiktananda who experienced the fulfillment of Christian experience in Advaitic experience.<sup>56</sup> Bede Griffiths continued Abhishiktananda's external thought and conceived atonement as return to unity, as awakening to our true being in the Word. The created being participates in the communion there is in Godhead between Father, Son and Holy Spirit<sup>57</sup>. Raimundo Panikkar is of the view that the role of Īśvara in Vedānta corresponds functionally to the role of Christ in Christian thought. It is not Īśvara but Christ who can be a proper link between the world and God, Christ who transcends Christianity and is the center of reality in a theanthropocosmic vision.<sup>58</sup> Sara Grant stressed the difference in the experience of 'aham brahmāsmi' between Christ and ordinary humans. Christ is the antithesis of self-assertion which is sin as avidyā and thus is the redeemer.<sup>59</sup> Vandana like the outer Abhishiktananda is for a theology of experience- we should have the Upaniṣadic experience and in that experience bring forth the Trinitarian experience as the culmination of Advaitic experience. She suggests a Christological interpretation of the Upaniṣads.<sup>60</sup>

Going beyond such Inclusivistic reinterpretations there are many theologians in India who receive Advaita Vedāntic thought totally in their endeavour of constructing Christian thought. Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya interpreted Trinity as *Saccidānanda* as well as creation

as *māyā*. He conceived the second person of the Trinity as *Chit* and the person of Jesus Christ in terms of Vedāntic human nature. If the knowing self is the Father, the known self or the self-begotten by Father's knowledge is the Son and *Chit* represents this meaning.<sup>61</sup> After maintaining God as absolutely different from all appearances as in Advaita Vedanta Carl Keller pointed out that Jesus Christ is God's appearance in the midst of appearances.<sup>62</sup> According to K. Subba Rao, the Divine Guru Jesus leads us from the *ajñāna* of egoism, body and matter to the *jñāna* of the affirmation of the non-dual spirit. Human destiny is to become perfect or Christ through renunciation and Jesus' help is needed for us to reach this goal. Renunciation or love and sacrifice which Christ has taught us through his life is the same as giving up duality which is to forsake the body to find the God behind it.<sup>63</sup> J. G. Arapura emphasizes that we must raise the question of Ultimate Reality in the Vedāntic fashion and at the same time, and within that question itself ask about the meaning of Jesus Christ. The meaning of Jesus Christ and Brahman are inexhaustible and at some great depth they meet and interpenetrate and that interpenetration is much more than the so-called indigenization or inculturation.<sup>64</sup> It is R. V. De Smet's opinion that Śaṅkara's conception of the *tādātmya* relation between world and Brahman can explain the relation between the human and divine natures in Christ; Christ's incarnation is a case of *vivaṛta*.<sup>65</sup> In S. J. Samartha's view Advaita represents a grand vision of unity that encompasses nature, humanity and God and this unitive vision of Advaita is very relevant for an Indian Christology. For him the theory of multiple *avatāras* is theologically sound in the pluralist context of India.<sup>66</sup> K. P. Aleaz expounded the person of Jesus as the extrinsic denominator (*upādhi*), the name and form (*nāmarūpa*), the effect (*kārya*) as well as the reflection (*ābhāsa*) and delimitation (*ghaṭākāśaḥ*) of Brahman. The function of Jesus was interpreted as to manifest the all-pervasive (*sarvagatatvam*), illuminative (*jyotiḥ*) and unifying (*ekīkrtya*) power of the Supreme Ātman.<sup>67</sup> Thus, there is a possibility of the emergence of a Christian philosophy in relation

to Advaita Vedāntic insights on major concepts such as God, Christ, human person and creation.

Indian Christians are fortunate to be acquainted with Advaita Vedāntic experience in order that it may enrich their faith-experience. Deeper dimensions of a Christian philosophy are manifesting through the aid of Śaṅkara's thought. Deeper meanings of the person and function of Jesus are emerging from within Advaita Vedānta. Indian Christian theologians are slowly recognizing this. Of course, all of them have not yet recognized this. As we saw still there are Indian Christian theologians who are Exclusivists and reject Advaita Vedānta. Still there are Indian Christian theologians who are Inclusivists, who try to reinterpret Advaita to suit their preformulated Christian standpoint and find the fulfillment of Advaita in Christ. But the good news is that there are many Christians who follow the approaches of either Pluralism or Pluralistic Inclusivism<sup>68</sup> and who are able to experience the fulfillment of a pre-formulated Christian theology in Advaitic experience. Advaita Vedānta makes Christian faith - experience new and refreshing. Advaita Vedānta inspires a creative Christian philosophy. The last one hundred and fifty years of the second millennium bear witness to this glorious truth.

#### 4. Conclusion

The distinctiveness of Indian philosophy as integrally related to Indian religions, as a creative coming together of reason and revelation, we noted as an encouragement to think of constructing an Indian Christian philosophy in relation to Indian philosophy. The six systems are put into practice by their respective followers for attaining the human end of liberation as fulfillment of life. Developing Christian thought especially in relation to Nyāya, Yoga, Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta is a possibility. Christians have responded both negatively and positively to the six systems of Indian philosophy. From the negative evaluations of the past, we are able today to learn lessons for the future. Negative evaluations of Christians will fade away and the positive ones alone

will stand out in history. Christians are inexperienced babies in relating to other religious faiths. But then the babies are not going to remain babies forever. They are growing. They will grow. They will grow to experience the diverse religious experiences of the world as the common property of humanity. They will grow to the experience of receiving insights from other religious philosophies in reconstructing their own religious philosophy, its method as well as its content. In the next chapter, we shall focus upon Indian philosophy's contribution in articulating the method of an Indian Christian philosophy.

### Notes

1. There are some Indian philosophers who may not accept this view. J. N. Mohanty is one of them. Philosophy for him is exclusively critical and rational thinking. Cf. Bina gupta (ed.), *Explorations in Philosophy. Essays by J. N. Mohanty. Volume I Indian Philosophy*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 17, 105-113.
2. Here again philosophers like J. N. Mohanty would hold that Śabda Pramāṇa is not revelation. For him the appeal to Śabda pramāṇa is appeal to sabda, which means to the text, to the language, to those words. There is a primacy of the text, not of the mystic experience of seers. He says that Śabda pramāṇa is neither appeal to testimony nor appeal to authority, nor appeal to revealed truths or to any mystic or non-mystic experiences. It is appeal simply to the meaning of the texts. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp.16-17. The question Mohanty has to answer is, if the meaning of the Upaniṣadic text indicates Brahman/Ātman could that not be a revelation of the Ultimate Reality or not.
3. T. M. P. Mahadevan, *Outlines of Hinduism*, Bombay: Chetana Ltd., 1977, pp.12-15; P. T. Raju, *The Philosophical Traditions of India*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971, pp. 25-27.
4. Cf. K. P. Aleaz, *The Role of Pramāṇas in Hindu-Christian Epistemology*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1991.
5. Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, Delhi: Motilal Banarasicass, 1964, p. 13; Satischandra Chatterjee and Dhirendramohan Datta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, Eighth Edition, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 2004. p. 2.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3; Cf. T. P. Ramachandran, *The Builders of Indian Philosophy Series: M. Hiriyanna*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2001, pp. 9-13.
7. M. Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, Bombay: George Allen & Unwin, 1973, pp. 17-20.
8. Satischandra Chatterjee and Dhirendramohan Data, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 14 – 22; S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy, Vol I.*, Bombay: Blackie & Son, 1983, pp. 24 – 31, 43 – 46.
9. R. N. Dandekar, *Insights into Hinduism*, Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1979, p. 8.

10. D. M. Datta, *The Chief Currents of Contemporary Philosophy*, Third Edition, Calcutta: The University of Calcutta, 1970, pp.577-78; Satischandra Chatterjee and Dhirendramohan Datta, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 1-50.
11. Harold G. Coward (ed.), *Studies in Indian Thought. Collected Papers of T. R. V. Murti*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983, pp. 1-16.
12. Satischandra Chatterjee and Dhirendramohan Datta, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 9-11; Ninian Smart, *Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964, pp. 125-45.
13. P. T. Raju, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 134-54.
14. Chandradhar Sharma, *Op. Cit.*, pp.191 – 210.
15. S. Radhakrishnan, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. II, pp.176 –247.
16. M. Hiriyanna, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 267 – 97.
17. Satischandra Chatterjee and Dhirendramohan Data, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 251 – 87.
18. Chandradhar Sharma, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 169 – 74.
19. Cf. Francis X. D'sa, *Śabdaprāmāṇyam in Śābara and Kumāṛila. Towards a Study of the Mīmāṃsā Language*, Vienna: Indological Institute, University of Vienna, 1980.
20. Cf. K. P. Aleaz, *The Relevance of Relation in Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta*, Delhi: Kant Publications, 1996.
21. Satischandra Chatterjee and Dhirendramohan Datta, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 413 – 29.
22. Cf. Rev. K. M. Banerjea, *Dialogue on the Hindu Philosophy, comprising the Nyaya, the Sankhya, the Vedant: to which is added a discussion of the authority of the Vedas*, London: Williams and Norgate, 1861; Nehemiah Nilkantha Sastri Goreh, *Hindu Philosophical systems. A Rational Refutation*, trans. from the original Hindi by Fitz-Edward Hall, D. C. L. Oxford, Calcutta: Bishop's College Press, 1862. For the current editions of these Cf. K. P. Aleaz (Comp. & Intro), *From Exclusivism to Inclusivism. The Theological Writings of Krishna Mohun Banerjea (1813-1885)*, Delhi: ISPCK, 1999; *A Christian Response to the Hindu Philosophical Systems by Nehemiah Nilakanth Sastri Goreh*, Kolkata: Punthi Pustak, 2003.
23. For a study of these responses, Cf. K. P. Aleaz, *Christian Thought Through Advaita Vedānta*, Delhi: ISPCK, 1996. For a study of all the important Christian responses to diverse Indian philosophical systems, Cf. K. P. Aleaz, *Christian Responses to Indian Philosophy*, Kolkata: Punthi Pustak, 2005.
24. K. P. Aleaz, (Comp. & Intro.), *A Christian Response to the Hindu Philosophical systems by Nehemiah Nilakantha Sastri Goreh*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 49-56.
25. K. P. Aleaz (Comp. & Intro.), *From Exclusivism to Inclusivism. The Theological Writings of Krishna Mohun Banerjea (1813-1885)*, *Op. Cit.*, pp.198-315.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 142-44.
27. *Ibid.*, pp.109-116, 136; *A Christian Response to the Hindu Philosophical Systems by N. N. S Goreh*, *Op. Cit.*, pp.163-208
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 173-92; *From Exclusivism to Inclusivism*, *Op. Cit.*, pp.62-84; Satischandra Chatterjee, *The Fundamentals of Hinduism. A Philosophical Study*, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1970, pp. 71-74, 83-91, 91-100.
29. John Vattanky, "Current Nyāya Studies and Contemporary Indian Theology", *Vidyajyoti*, Vol. IX, No. 8, August 1991, p. 466.

30. John Vattanky, "New Perspectives in Nyāya Researches" in *Christian Contribution to Indian Philosophy*, ed. by Anand Amaladass, Madras: CLS, 1995, pp. 231-33; "Theological Implications of the Nyāya System", *Vidyajyoti*, Vol. XLVII, No. 7, August 1983, pp.337-39.
31. John Vattanky, "Current Nyāya Studies and Contemporary Indian Theology", *Op. Cit.*, pp. 467-68.
32. Cf. K. P. Aleaz, *The Role of Pramāṇas in Hindu-Christian Epistemology*. *Op. Cit.*
33. From Exclusivism to Inclusivism. The Theological Writings of Krishna Mohun Banerjea (1813-1885), *op. cit.*, p. 163; Satischandra Chatterjee and Dharendra Mohan Datta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, *Op. Cit.*, pp.259-60.
34. *A Christian Response to the Hindu Philosophical Systems by Nehemiah Nilakantha Sastri Goreh*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 137-54; Satischandra Chatterjee and Dharendra Mohan Datta, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 264, 282.
35. *A Christian Response to the Hindu Philosophical Systems by Nehemiah Nilakantha Sastri Goreh*, *Op. Cit.*, pp.123-30; *From Exclusivism to Inclusivism*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 173-85; 46-47; Satischandra Chatterjee and Dharendra Mohan Datta, *Op. Cit.*, pp.284-86.
36. Swami Abhishiktananda, *Prayer*, Delhi: ISPCK, 1975, pp. 44-46, 61-62, 81-83.
37. Sister Vandana, *Nama Japa (The Prayer of the Name)*, Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, 1984, pp. 18, 157-62.
38. Thomas Manickam, "Yoga. A sādhanā for harmony of life" in *Indian Christian Spirituality*, ed. by D. S. Amalorpavadass, Banbalore: NBCLC, 1982, pp. 178-81; Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, Pondichery: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1955; *Synthesis of Yoga*, Pondichery: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1971.
39. A. S. Appasamy Pillai, *The use of Yoga in Prayer*, Madras: CLS, 1926, pp. 8ff, 17-19; *Fifty Years' Pilgrimage of a Convert*, London/Madras: CMS, 1924, pp. 99, 103, 117; Kaj Baago, *Pioneers of Indigenous Christianity*, Bangalore/Madras: CISRS/CLS, 1969, p. 25.
40. Thomas Matus, *Yoga and the Jesus Prayer Tradition. An Experiment in Faith*, Bangalore: ATC, 1992, pp. 11, 12, 32, 101-102, 106-107.
41. B. C. M. Mascarenhas, *Yoga and Christian Thought*, Bombay: St. Paul Publications, n. d., pp. 74-76, 88.
42. From Exclusivism to Inclusivism, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 51-54; 329-35; K. P. Aleaz, *The Role of Pramāṇas in Hindu- Christian Epistemology*, *Op. Cit.*
43. *A Christian Response to the Hindu Philosophical Systems by Nehemiah Nilakantha Sastri Goreh*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 154-60; S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II, *Op. Cit.*, pp.417-21.
44. Francis X. D'Sa, *Śabdaprāmāṇyam in Śabara and Kumarila*, *Op. Cit.*; "Dhvani as a method of Interpretation", *Biblebhasyam*, Vol. V, No. 4, Dec. 1979, pp.276-89.
45. A. J. Appasamy, *The Theology of Hindu Bhakti*, Madras: CLS, 1970; "Christological Reconstruction and Ramanuja's Philosophy", *The International Review of Missions*, Vol. XLI, No. 162, April 1952, pp.170-76; *The Gospel and India's Heritage*, London & Madras: SPCK, 1942, pp. 256-58, 75-93.
46. Cf. I. Puthiadam, *Visnu the ever free. A Study of the Madhva Concept of God*, Madurai etc. : Dialogue Series, 1985; *God in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas and Sri Mādhvācārya*, Madurai: Dialogue Series, 1981.

47. *From Exclusivism to Inclusivism. The Theological Writings of Krishna Mohun Banerjea (1813-1885)*, Op. Cit., pp. 262-63; *A Christian Response to the Hindu Philosophical Systems by Nehemiah Nilakantha Sastri Goreh*, Op. Cit., pp. 233-55.
48. Ibid., pp.305-324
49. *From Exclusivism to Inclusivism. The Theological Writings of Krishna Mohun Banerjea (1813-1885)*, Op. Cit., pp.232-63; 289-92.
50. Ibid., pp. 200, 264-65, 286-88; *A Christian Response to the Hindu Philosophical Systems by Nehemiah Nilakantha Sastri Goreh*, Op. Cit., pp. 337-41.
51. Cf. K. P. Aleaz, *The Relevance of Relation in Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta*, Op. Cit.
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### III

## INDIAN PHILOSOPHY AND THE METHOD OF AN INDIAN CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

**M**ethod in philosophy points to epistemology and therefore we shall look into some features of Indian epistemology centered on the *pramāṇas* (valid sources of knowledge) and their application in Indian Christian philosophy as Indian Christian *pramāṇas*. Equally important and integrally inter-connected with it is the understanding and interpretation process or hermeneutics in Indian Christian epistemology till date as well as the articulation of a viable Christian theology of religions and we shall study these in terms of a few creative insights of some of the Indian Christian thinkers. We shall take up these two first and then pass on to a study of Indian Christian *pramāṇas* as emerging from Indian philosophical *pramāṇas*.

### 1. Hermeneutics in Indian

#### Christian Epistemology Till today

There is great significance for the Indian hermeneutical context in arriving at Indian Christian thought. Hermeneutical context points to Indian Christian self-identity as well as the socio-politico-religio-cultural realities of India. It upholds the fact that knowledge is formulated in the very knowing process and Indian Christian philosophy is a continuous integrated process involving creation, humans and their

Innermost Ātman or God simultaneously. Therefore Inculturation, Indigenization or Contextualisation of the gospel is an unreality; what really happens is the opposite i.e., gospelation of the hermeneutical context or experiencing the emerging gospel from within a hermeneutical context.<sup>1</sup>

Hermeneutics is “the whole process in and through which we come to understand the subject matter of a text or tradition out of our context.”<sup>2</sup> What we are concerned here is the very phenomenon and process of understanding Christian thought by Indian Christians as well as the determinative context and conditions for such understanding. It is within the context of the interaction between the text, tradition, and the community that an authentic understanding of the text is possible.<sup>3</sup> Any hermeneutical situation depends upon three distinct features in the experience of the interpreter and the community of interpretation to which he/she belongs namely the memory or the remembered meaning of the text through the earlier encounters with the text in the ‘inner history’ of the interpreter and/or his/her community, the praxiological interest and concerns of the community or the interpreter and the ‘anticipatory awareness’ or hope of the interpreter(s).<sup>4</sup> These three constitute the hermeneutical situation of the interpreter and the dynamic character and the creative newness of the hermeneutical process have their basis in these.

The relation of the interpreter to all dimensions of life, which he/she experiences in his/her context, is important for the valid process of understanding. The context decides the content of what we understand. The history of one’s family, community and nation for example contributes to what one is, what one’s self-identity is, what one’s context is and these decide the content of what one understands and experiences. No one can dispute the fact that understanding and interpretation (hermeneutics) takes place in relation to what we are and what our surroundings are. What I am, what my background is, what my community’s history is, what my nation’s history is, is my

hermeneutical context and that determines what I understand and interpret. So the point is, my context is never given by anything or anybody external to me, my community, my nation rather it emerges from what I am, what my community is and what my nation is. The givenness is the givenness of my hermeneutical context alone, which will surely have its own choices and presuppositions. Nothing is pre-given other than the hermeneutical context. Context always means one's hermeneutical context, which is diverse.<sup>5</sup> Our perceptions of our life-worlds differ within India and so our understanding of reality may also differ. Consequently, the articulation of our understandings of reality or the form of theologies philosophies will also differ in India. If every authentic moment of understanding is shaped by the historicity of the interpreter it is important to identify those matters which constitute the specific Indian Christian hermeneutical contexts.<sup>6</sup> What are the Indian Christian horizons out of which Indian Christians understand everything that they understand is an important question here. We can undoubtedly say that one horizon definitely is Indian philosophy.

Christian thought is not pre-formulated, but is always in the process of formulation. There is no pre-given, pre-formulated Gospel. The Gospel is always in a process of formulation. Indian Christian theology is always in a process of formulation. Indian Christian philosophy is always in a process of formulation. There is always the emergence of the new in the understanding of the person and function of Jesus. We cannot accept some timeless interpretation from somewhere and make it applicable to our context. Understanding and interpretation belongs exclusively to us and to our context, and there is the possibility for the emergence of new meaning in the process of this.<sup>7</sup> The assumption that first there is some readymade piece of precious knowable material given to humans and then we undertake the hard work of understanding it, is unconvincing. In reality knowledge does not happen that way. Knowledge of anything is an immediate existential knowledge formulated in the very knowing-process. Knowledge of anything is an

immediate existential knowledge of the thing by the knower; the content of knowledge itself is formulated in the very knowing process. The epistemology of Advaita Vedānta enlightens us that in the supreme sense there is no gap between the knower, the knowledge and the object known.<sup>8</sup>

In our knowing-process there exists nothing externally ready made that can be adapted indigenized, incultured or contextualised. These imply the misconception that in theology philosophy what is needed is just revising the language in which the unchanging Gospel is clothed: what is already known as the constant is now only to be localized. But if we think something as constant, we have to claim a commensurate finality for the sphere of thought within which it arose.<sup>9</sup> Another point to be noted is, underlying the concepts like indigenization and contextualization, there seems to be the notion of a false dichotomy between message and context. We should note that the message is always apprehended together with the acquired structure of consciousness given in a context. Language and human apprehension arise together in the mind's act.<sup>10</sup> "We comprehend whatever we comprehend only in terms of concepts and categories given in our context. There is no conceptual experience apart from our immediately given linguistic structure that shapes our ordinary human experience".<sup>11</sup>

There are Indian thinkers who have argued that there is no such word as 'indigenize' in the verbal form and therefore the usual expression 'indigenization' is linguistically untenable.<sup>12</sup> "Someone or something either is indigenous or is not. 'Indigenization' therefore is a contradiction in terms. It is an attempt – an artificial attempt – to make indigenous that which is not indigenous."<sup>13</sup> 'Indigenization of the gospel implies the wrong notions that the gospel is something foreign. Christian theology is translation of the Christian faith into a given situation and the gospel as well as history is static.'<sup>14</sup> Further, theologically indigenization would be a denial of the basic Christian

theological affirmation that God is the Creator of the whole universe.<sup>15</sup> “‘Indigenization’ really means first of all the branding of God as a ‘foreigner’ in his/her own home and then having branded him a ‘foreigner’, seeking to make him ‘indigenous’ in our own country, nation, culture and so on.”<sup>16</sup>

But we should understand God as always indigenous to India as to any other country and his/her indigeneity has a salvific purpose. Hence “the task of any indigenous theology is not to seek to indigenize a God who is a foreigner, but rather to seek to understand God who is indigenous to any given situation and is savingly active in the dynamics of a given history.”<sup>17</sup> Indigenous God has to be interpreted in an indigenous history in all its totality with its religious, cultural, philosophical and socio-political aspects in order to arrive at an indigenous theology, philosophy.<sup>18</sup>

There are Asian theologians who are of the view that not Inculturation but Enreligionization is what naturally happens. The Church fathers had the idea only the culture of Rome and the philosophy of Greece were worth being adapted by the church. In other words the Church stood for a separation of religion from culture (as in Latin Christianity) and religion from philosophy (as in Hellenistic Christianity) and thus propagated a ‘Christ-against-religion theology’.<sup>19</sup> But this sort of a separation of religion from culture and philosophy does not make sense in Asian Society. In the Asian context culture and religion are overlapping facets of the indivisible soteriology which is at once both a philosophy that is basically a religious vision, and a religion that is a philosophy of life.<sup>20</sup>

The very word ‘inculturation’ which is of Catholic origin and inspiration, is based on this culture-religion dichotomy of the Latins, in that it could, and often does, mean the insertion of ‘the Christian religion minus European culture’ into an ‘Asian culture minus non-Christian religion’. This is inconceivable in the South Asian context..., what seems possible and even necessary there is not just *inculturation* but ‘*enreligionization*’ of the Church.<sup>21</sup>

In the Asian context we cannot separate a philosophy or culture from its soteriological religious content. The Greek manner of instrumentalizing philosophy and the Latin practice of instrumentalizing a non-Christian culture, becomes a 'theological vandalism' in Asia.<sup>22</sup> When we receive for example 'Buddhist techniques' of meditation in 'Christian prayer' we have to take into account the soteriological context of such techniques; the Buddhist way and Buddhist truth go side by side; method cannot be severed from goal.<sup>23</sup> The Church has truncated Asian culture and philosophy from their religious context and then used these against Asian religions, to baptize Asian religiousness and to convert people from Asian religions. This is nothing but Christian triumphalism which has no reverence for the wholeness of the religious experience of others.<sup>24</sup>

Cultural incursions in Asia have religious consequences. When Christians adopt Hindu cultural forms they are making fundamental theological statements regarding the nature of both Christianity and Hinduism. If Christians chant Om and the Gayatri they are using a living symbol and sharing the power of that i.e., they join the Hindu tradition in seeing Om as the recapitulation of the universe, similar to what Christians see in the eschatological Christ. They are acknowledging here that they are comfortable in sharing the power of a symbol which denotes an entire universe of discourse, worship and action.<sup>25</sup> In fact in 1989 the Indian theological Association preferred the word interculturalisation to express mutual fecundation in the dialogical experience of pluralism. If religion is the soul of culture, culture gives religion its language. In the encounter between two religions/cultures the symbiosis that happens is called interculturalisation. Interculturalisation means to accept the *mythos* of the other and it challenges the partners to a new self-understanding involving a continuous process of reinterpretation.<sup>26</sup>

Such an understanding of hermeneutics in Indian Christian thought is in line with the insights imparted by people like Wittgenstein, Hans-

Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and Karl Mannheim. A point, which Wittgenstein wanted to stress, is that the way in which we experience our environment depends upon the system of concepts that we use and that this is carried from generation to generation in the language in terms of which we think and behave. There is thus a relativity of forms of experience to what he sometimes called language-games. Our understanding and interpretation is 'language-limited'.<sup>27</sup> The science of hermeneutics developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur stresses that all knowledge is interpreted knowledge. In all knowledge the object comes to us through the lens that we use to perceive it and this is the 'interpretative' view of truth.<sup>28</sup>

Further, our knowledge is limited in terms of geography, culture and social standing. Any statement of the meaning of something is seen to be 'perceptival' and relational – 'standpoint-bound' according to the sociology of knowledge developed by Karl Mannheim.<sup>29</sup>

Even Thomas Aquinas, Immanuel Kant and above all the Syādvāda of Jainism of India ratify such a perception of hermeneutics. Thomas Aquinas propounded the following epistemological principle: "Things known are in the knower according to the mode of the knower"<sup>30</sup> The human mind is continuously involved in interpreting the data of perception in terms of the conceptual systems within which we live. The perceived world is partly constructed by the activity of perception; i.e., there is a reality there, but the form in which we are conscious of it comes from ourselves. The Ultimate Reality is known in accordance with the cognitive mode/nature/state of the knower; and this varies, in the case of religious awareness, from one religio-cultural totality to another.<sup>31</sup> We have to distinguish between a thing as it is in itself and that thing as a phenomenon, as humanly perceived as Immanuel Kant did. Therefore there is a human contribution to the forms in which we are aware of our ultimate environment, the universal presence of the Divine.<sup>32</sup> According to the Syadvada of Jainism, which is fully developed at least by 6<sup>th</sup> c. CE, every object has infinite aspects judged

from different point of views. Every judgment is true only in relation to a particular aspect of the thing seen from a particular point of view and hence is not the whole truth. Every judgment about an object is true only in reference to the standpoint occupied and the aspect of the object considered. Therefore it should be qualified by some word like 'syat' (i.e., in some respect) to clarify the limitation of this judgment and the possibility of alternative judgments from other points of view. There are seven ways of predication and this is called *saptabhaṅgī*. There is a possibility of seven modes only with respect to the affirmation and negation of each modification in a single entity, but the groups of seven modes are infinite because of the infinite modifications possible.<sup>33</sup>

## 2. A Viable Indian Christian Theology of Religions

Theological method raises the issue of a viable theology of religions, which we have identify as Pluralistic Inclusivism and which is different from Exclusivism, Inclusivism and Pluralism. Pluralistic Inclusivism inspires each religious faith to be pluralistically inclusive i.e., on the one hand each living faith is to become truly pluralistic by other faiths contributing to its conceptual content and on the other Inclusivism is to transform its meaning to witness the fulfillment of the theological and spiritual contents of one's own faith in and through the contributions of other living faiths. Such a perspective rejects the other schools in theology of religions Exclusivism, Inclusivism and Pluralism as defective. According to Exclusivism one's own religious faith is the only valid path to liberation and that is the criterion by other faiths are understood and evaluated. Inclusivism accepts the divine presence in other faiths but rejects them as not being sufficient for liberation apart from one's own faith. According to it, all the truth in other religions belongs ultimately to one's own faith, which is its fulfillment. Pluralism holds the view that all religions are equally salvific paths to the one God. The Ultimate Reality upon which the faith of all believers is focused in every religion is the same, though interpretations of its

essential nature may vary. Exclusivism is its own rejection, what Inclusivism has is only a disguised Exclusivism and Pluralism is not a solution to religious Pluralism.<sup>34</sup>

Pluralistic Inclusivism is a perspective in inter-religious relations in which all the religious resources of the world are considered as the common property of the whole humanity. All religious experiences and traditions are simultaneously ours. We do not have any one particular religious tradition alone as our own and others as belonging to others. All are mine as well as all are for all others. All belong to all. It is a religious perspective in which while remaining in one's own religious faith-experience, one can consider other faiths as one's own, as the common property of humanity, for an increasingly blessed and enriched life. Here the otherness of the other is negated. Our natural tendency is to affirm the separate identity and uniqueness of our religious experience as compared to the other religious experiences. After affirming the separateness, we may try to dialogue with the others, seeking an opportunity for authentic witness of our faith as well as learning from other faiths. Pluralistic Inclusivism is an entirely different perspective than this. It is the affirmation of the interconnected identity and uniqueness of all religious experiences as our own and here our witness is to a world faith and our theology is a world theology.<sup>35</sup>

Again, Pluralistic Inclusivism suggests the relational convergence of religions. An important aspect of relational convergence of religions is mutual conversion. Being born in a religion does not mean that we should die in that religion in the same way as we were born. We can get converted into the true spirit of once own religion and in that very conversion get converted into another religious experience as well. The faith-experience of the Indian Christian is not pre-formulated, but is in the process of formulation through the guidance of Hindu and other religious experiences. Indian Christian philosophy is a conversion of Christian theology to the Indian religio-cultural context.<sup>36</sup> In the

very conversion to Jesus in India, there is a conversion to the religio-cultural context of India, effecting thus a double conversion and this hinders to the possible relational convergence of religious experiences.

Here we are challenged to evolve a more comprehensive role for other religions in Christian experience than what has been envisaged in the past. To reduce the role of religions to liberational praxis is a reductionism. To reduce the interpretation of religions solely in terms of Folk tales again would be a reductionism. Of course our focus should be the people, as has been emphasized by the Asian theologians; but people centered on a comprehensive religious life. How the comprehensive religious life of people of other faiths is related to the gospel of God in Jesus is the basic question to be answered in the third millennium.<sup>37</sup>

Also, there is growth in the richness of religious experiences by mutual sharing and separatist tendency in religious experience is discouraged by Pluralistic Inclusivism. All are common resources and they are used commonly. There is social justice maintained in the realm of religious experiences by sharing with those who do not have, but this is an entirely different attitude from that of imposing upon others forcibly what they do not want. Pluralistic Inclusivism always maintains humility to see that others have better things than us.<sup>38</sup> The superiority of others is always affirmed in it, rather than claiming our own superiority. In other words, here there is a reversal of the positions of Exclusivism and Inclusivism which maintain one's own superiority in religious beliefs over against others as well as which try to impose one's own convictions on others. According to Pluralistic Inclusivism, if one is intimately familiar with one's own religious system alone, that is a very religiously poverty stricken condition; Exclusivists are thus religiously very poor. Pluralistic Inclusivism upholds just distribution of religious resources. If economic justice is very hard to attain, as one has to fight for it, the case of resources related to religious experiences may be of easy access though Patriarchy and initiation procedures may try to create barriers. The point is, there is a possibility for

“religious justice” in the world, which is economically unjust due to the oppression of the South by the North. Imposing one’s own faith on others is the only religious injustice, and the Semitic religions as well as the colonial rulers have resorted to this in some areas and periods in the past.<sup>39</sup> If so, the call of Pluralistic Inclusivism is for religious justice; for the just distribution of religious resources. There is no more imposition of religious resources, but only the whole-hearted mutual reception of these by people of diverse faiths. If religious separateness and rivalry have caused much bloodshed in the history of humanity Pluralistic Inclusivism should cause the opposite. In Pluralistic Inclusivism there will no more be any killing of others; there will only be self-sacrifice for the sake of others; there will only be self-sacrifice for the growth of the religious experiences of others as well as for the growth of one’s own religious experience.<sup>40</sup>

The age of considering different religions as isolated, self-contained compartments is over. The age of considering other faiths as inferior to one’s own is again over. Mutual interaction and enrichment on an equal footing is the inevitable reality for today and all the days to come. Different religions will contribute to each other in arriving at the content of the faith-experience of each. The different ‘paths’ are no more entirely different, isolated paths. Each path becomes a path by receiving insights from other paths. Hence, the important point is the question of the uniqueness of one path as compared to other paths does not arise any more. Now, what we are interested in is the unique blending of two or more paths together for the emergence of the creatively new in each of the earlier paths. This is dynamic interaction. In addition, conflict between different paths cannot have the last word anymore; there is a possibility for a natural growth from relational divergence to relational distinctiveness to relational convergence of religions.<sup>41</sup>

One important aspect of Asian context is religious pluralism and Christian pilgrimage is progressive integration of the truth that is

revealed to others in one's own experience of the story of Jesus. We have a duty to identify the glorious ways in which Gods revelations are available to us in other religious experiences, which can help in our experience of new dimensions of meanings of the gospel of God in Jesus.<sup>42</sup> Rather than evaluating other religious experiences in terms of a preformulated criteria, we have to allow ourselves to be evaluated by them in our understanding of the gospel. They in Holy Spirit will provide us with new meanings of the person and function of Jesus, rather than we dictate to them always. From particular Jesus we have to come to the universal Jesus.<sup>43</sup> Universal Jesus belongs to the whole of humanity in Holy Spirit.

How can we arrive at an authentic understanding of Christ or the Christian gospel is the important question. Who decides the content of the meaning of Christ and the gospel is the fundamental question. The meaning of Christ and the Christian gospel has to emerge in the process of an inter-religious communication. Nobody is giving the Christian philosopher alone the authority to decide the content of an 'authentic gospel'. People from diverse religio-cultural backgrounds will, in terms of their contexts, decide the content of the gospel. There are diverse ways in which the gospel has been experienced by people of other religious faiths, especially of Asia. The Hindus for example, in spite of the missionary aggression on their religion, could experience the gospel of God in Jesus in terms of Neo-Vedāntic thought.<sup>44</sup> Neo-Vedānta proclaims the gospel that Jesus had a non-dual relation with God and he is inspiring all the humans also to have the same relation with God through the renunciation of the lower self. Neo-Vedāntic Christology is of course just one among the many developments in Indian Christian Theology. Similar line of development of understanding of Jesus and the gospel are there in other Asian countries undertaken by those who are members of a church as well as those who are not, in the context of diverse religious experiences. Here there is a need to question the very conception that Christians are the sole custodians of the Gospel of God in Jesus. Jesus transcends Christianity. We very

badly need the help of diverse religious faiths in arriving at the meaning and message of Jesus. There is a need to attempt a comprehensive analysis of the gospel as interpreted by all the diverse religious experiences of the world and this has to be carried out in terms of expositions by both those who are outside and inside the church.<sup>45</sup> Here comes the relevance of Indian philosophy in the construction of an Indian Christian philosophy.

### 3. The Pramāṇas (Valid Sources of Knowledge) and the Method of an Indian Christian Philosophy

Indian epistemology teaches that it is through the *pramāṇas* or valid sources of knowledge that we arrive at a theory of reality or metaphysics. A sound epistemology provides a sound philosophical or theological method and it leads to a sound theory of reality – theory of the human person, the universe and God – i.e., metaphysics or theology.<sup>46</sup>

The main problems of epistemology are: How far can we know reality? How does knowledge originate and develop? This second question involves the problem: What are the different sources of knowledge? This problem forms one of the chief topics of Indian epistemology. Knowledge of reality or valid cognition is called *pramā* and the source of such knowledge is called *pramāṇa*. There are altogether six *pramāṇas* or ‘sources of valid knowledge’ identified in Indian Philosophy namely *pratyakṣa* (perception), *anumāna* (inference), *śabda* (verbal testimony or scripture), *upamāna* (comparison), *arthāpatti* (postulation), and *anupalabdhi* (non-cognition). Some Indian philosophers (the Cārvākas) accept only the first; some (the Bauddhas and some Vaiśeṣikas) only the first and the second; some others (the Sāṅkhyas, the Yogins and the Jainas) only the first, second and the third; still others (the naiyāyikas) only the first four; some others (the Prābhākaras) the first five and still some others (the Bhāṭṭas and Advaita Vedāntins) all the six as valid sources of knowledge.<sup>47</sup> While not ignoring other schools, it is the Advaitic

understanding of *pramāṇas* which is suitable for acceptance in the articulation of the Indian Christian *pramāṇas* and a significant feature of our method in identifying and expounding the Indian Christian *pramāṇas* is to give total freedom to the *pramāṇas* of Indian philosophy to function as Indian Christian *pramāṇas*.

Out of the six *pramāṇas*, if śabda can be classified under revelation, the other five are classified under reason. But it should be noted that there is an integral relationship between reason and revelation in Indian epistemology<sup>48</sup> and consequently in Indian Christian thought. All these five *pramāṇas* which constitute the realm of human rationality and are always illumined by the innermost Ātman are the ways in which we perceive reality. In the Indian perspective there is nothing called pure reason or pure revelation because there is no real gulf between humanity and divinity. Reason and revelation both are integrally related and the outcome of the interplay of non-dual divine-humanity.<sup>49</sup> Revelation as it is recorded in the scripture again, is apprehended by us through these very means of reason. Moreover śabda as revelation in Indian philosophy and subsequently in Indian Christian philosophy transcends any dogmatism and hence is in line with human rationality. In Indian philosophical/theological method this inter-connection between reason and revelation emerges as an important emphasis.

In Indian Christian philosophical/theological method, which follows the footsteps of Indian philosophy, śabda is a sound used as a symbol for the expression of some meaning and hence stands for a 'word'; it means word or words as the source of knowledge and then corresponds to 'authority' or testimony.<sup>50</sup> By establishing śabda as an ultimate source of knowledge, the Indian Christian philosopher upholds the authority of the Bible and extra-Biblical scriptures. Scriptures are superhuman (*apauruṣeya*) and eternal not in any dogmatic sense but because the words of which they are composed are eternal.<sup>51</sup> A word signifies not a particular (*vyakti*), but the universal class character (*jāti* or *ākṛti*) which is eternal<sup>52</sup>; the scriptures in their essential reality

is identical with the absolute consciousness, and when they are ‘seen’ or ‘found’, they are identical with this pure consciousness as reflected in the *upādhi* (extrinsic denominator) of *manas* (mind).<sup>53</sup> The Indian Christian whole-heartedly receives not the ‘particular’ Bible, but the ‘universal’ Bible. The Indian Christian philosopher whole-heartedly receives not the ‘particular Jesus’ but the ‘universal Jesus’. The ‘universal Jesus’ is identical with God the Absolute, but the ‘particular Jesus’ is a mere reflection of God the Absolute in the extrinsic denominator of the mind of first century Palestine. The understanding of *śabda* as a source of valid knowledge thus elevates Bible as well as other scriptures from the historical to the eternal, from human (*pauruṣeya*) level to the super-human (*apauruṣeya*) level, from dogmatism to universality and at that level there is no conflict of Truth-claims. Further, *prāmāṇya-svatastva vāda*<sup>54</sup> which is the standpoint that the validity of verbal knowledge is constituted by and also known through the intrinsic conditions of verbal knowledge itself, clarifies to us the self-validity of the Bible and other scriptures.

In the matters of Biblical hermeneutics and exegesis it is *lakṣyārtha*<sup>55</sup> i.e., the secondary meaning, related to the first and brought out by a definite context according to the speaker’s or writer’s intention which has to be taken into consideration. If the Vedānta-statements are interpreted through this *lakṣaṇā* method, the gospel-statements also can be interpreted similarly. Regarding the meaning of a sentence we have to take note of *abhitānvaya-vāda*<sup>56</sup> which points to the knowledge of the meaning of a sentence as a new kind of meaning as compared to the meaning of words. For this new kind of knowledge, which is called *śābda-bodha*, the conditions to be fulfilled<sup>57</sup> are *ākāṁkṣā* or feeling of incompleteness by each word, *yogyatā* or capacity to satisfy another word’s want, *āsatti* or proximity between two words and *tātparyajñāna* or the knowledge of what is intended. The signs for ascertaining what is intended by a passage are introduction (*upakrama*), conclusion (*upasaṁhāra*), repetition (*abhyāsa*), originality (*apurvata*), result (*bhala*), eulogy (*arthavada*) and

demonstration (*upapatti*)<sup>58</sup> and these are profitable aids for Indian Form Criticism.<sup>59</sup> Also, the subject (*uddesya*) and predicate (*vidheya*) relationship in a sentence as identified by Indian logic can enlighten us to understand the construction of Bible sentences.<sup>60</sup> The classification of the Biblical portions into those concerned with ritualism (*karmakāṇḍa*) and those concerned with the realization of the Supreme Reality (*jñānakanda*) is again a possibility which Indian hermeneutics offers us.<sup>61</sup>

The source of valid knowledge perception (*pratyakṣa*) in Indian Philosophy as well as in Indian Christian philosophy is what is presented before the sense organs, an immediate and direct knowledge in which the mind being always illumined by the Ātman who is pure consciousness and witness (*sākṣin*), through the senses assumes the form of the object.<sup>62</sup> Indian Philosophy as well as Indian Christian philosophy classifies the two stages of perception as indeterminate (*nirvikalpaka*) and determinate (*savikalpaka*); in the latter the apprehended elements are differentiated and related in the form of a judgment.<sup>63</sup> By way of the *pramāṇa* perception, Indian epistemology provides the following three insights to Indian Christian epistemology: (i) Sense-perception can never be challenged in its own field; all human sense-experiences are authentic and they can help in the clarification of Biblical and philosophical insights.<sup>64</sup> Indian Christian philosophical method is not abstract articulations. Perception as a theological method makes theology rooted in day-to-day experiences; in observed facts. (ii) Perception proclaims that there is an unbroken continuum between all living beings and the external world. There is an inseparable relation between humans and nature because the material world as well as the material body is constituted by the same five elements (*pañcabhūta*) and each *indriya* (*sense-organ*) is composed of the same element, the quality of which is sensed by it.<sup>65</sup> The five elements earth, water, fire, air and ether have the qualities of smell, taste, colour or form, touch and sound respectively; and the five sense-organs which receive the impressions of these qualities are themselves constituted

by these elements respectively. Thus sense-perception is not something accidental but rather it is the expression of the solidarity that exists between humans and nature. Our solidarity with nature<sup>66</sup> is an important tool in doing Indian Christian philosophy and perception is the practical means of using this tool creatively. (iii) Perception is not only the affirmation of the integral relation that exists between humans and nature, but also the affirmation of the integral relation that exists between the Innermost Ātman, humans and nature; Ātman being innermost to both humans and nature. The integral God-human-nature relationship makes perception an authentic method of doing Indian Christian philosophy. Perception as an Indian philosophical method is the method of integration of reality<sup>67</sup> and not of separation and disintegration. It destroys the distorted notions of God as alienated from humans and the universe, of humans as alienated from God and the universe, and of the universe as alienated from God and humans.

Inference (*anumāna*) in Indian philosophy and consequently in Indian Christian epistemology is a process of reasoning in which we pass from the apprehension of some mark or sign (*liṅga or hetu*) to that of something else, by virtue of a relation of invariable concomitance (*vyāpti*) between the two.<sup>68</sup> It is a knowledge which follows some other knowledge. The rule for ascertaining *vyapti* or generalization is the method of agreement in presence (*anvaya*), together with the non-observation of any exception.<sup>69</sup> Inference challenges us to identify the invariable concomitances (*vyaptis*) in Christian philosophical issues in terms of the present-day Indian context and through these to come to new creative content of Christian thought. To cite some examples, humanity and divinity are two prominent philosophical issues and there is an invariable concomitance between these two. Wherever we see true humanity in India, there is true divinity. In Jesus there was true humanity and therefore true divinity as well. Again, there is an invariable relationship between love and self-sacrifice and seeing the self-sacrifice of Jesus we get to know that he is the manifestation of the love of God. Also, we see Jesus himself using inference as a

source of valid knowledge (Cf. Lk. 21.29; Mt. 24.32-35; Mk. 13.28-31). Inference also helps us to identify the defective points in a wrong theology by pointing out the fallacies of its syllogisms<sup>70</sup> like the absence of examples (*dr̥ṣṭāntas*) or inconclusive *liṅgas*, the vicious circle (*cakraka*) or begging the question, infinite regress (*anavastha*), abandonment of the basic proposition (*pratijñāhāni*), inability to solve the difficulty in one's own system (*svapakṣadoṣa*), negative cases of *vyāpti* etc. Inference as a philosophical method helps in the dialectical process of exhaustion (*pariśeṣānumāna*) or showing that each of the alternatives proposed in the case is defective, except one's own position. Further, inference as an Indian Christian philosophical method has the potentiality and power to correct one-sided theologies whether they are action-oriented<sup>71</sup> or meditation-oriented.<sup>72</sup> Indian Christian inference can be either for one's own certainty (*svārtha*) or for demonstrating a truth to other persons (*parārtha*) through the step or members (*avayavas*) of inference like *pratijñā* (statement of the proposition to be proved, e.g., the mountain is fiery), *hetu* (statement of the reason, e.g., because it has smoke), *udāharaṇa* (statement of the universal proposition along with an instance, e.g., wherever there is smoke there is fire, as in the hearth) etc.<sup>73</sup> The maximum will to infer is an important requisite of Indian Christian philosophy.

When we relate the Indian philosophical *pramāṇa* Comparison (*upamāna*) to Indian Christian philosophical method, we see along with the Mīmāṃsakas and the Vedāntins that the knowledge of similarity about an absent object is obtained by comparison. Knowledge arises from comparison when, on perceiving a present object to be like an object perceived in the past (e.g., *this wild cow is like my cow*), we come to know that the remembered object is like the perceived one (i.e., *my cow is like this wild cow*).<sup>74</sup> In Indian Christian philosophical categories for example, we can say that on perceiving the present subject of our attention namely Jesus to be like the person pointed out by the Old Testament and the Upaniṣads, we come to know that the Old Testament and the Upaniṣads definitely point to

Jesus whom we experience.<sup>75</sup> If we take comparison in a wider sense of any analogical knowledge of an unperceived object as being similar to some known object, as the early Mīmāṃsaka Śabara had conceived it<sup>76</sup>, the scope of this Indian Christian *pramāṇa* becomes larger; we can leap from the known to the unknown. We can leap for example, from human person to God, from the material world to God.<sup>77</sup> Here Comparison gives birth to inductive theology proper. Comparison is different from both Perception and Inference. It is different from Perception<sup>78</sup> because the features of cow and wild cow are not identical and so we cannot say that by perceiving one we perceive the other. It is not an Inference<sup>79</sup> because in it the conclusion is reached directly without the knowledge of an invariable relation (*vyāpti*). It is the Naiyāyika understanding of Comparison i.e., Comparison gives the knowledge that certain word denotes a certain class of object (*e.g., the word wild cow denotes the class of objects similar to the cow*) which can be obtained either through Testimony or through Inference.<sup>80</sup>

Following Indian philosophy, Indian Christian epistemology understands postulation (*arthāpatti*) as the necessary supposition of an unperceived fact which alone can explain a phenomenon that demands explanation.<sup>81</sup> For example we cannot in any way reconcile the two facts fatness and fasting, unless we admit that the person eats at night. If Inference tries to find out what follows from given premises, Postulation tries to find out what is presupposed by the given. There are two classes of *arthāpatti* namely *dr̥ṣṭārthāpatti*<sup>82</sup> and *śrutārthāpatti*.<sup>83</sup> The former is the supposition of a fact for explaining perceived facts and the latter is the assumption of a fact in explaining a fact known through testimony or scripture. Both these are very useful Christian philosophical methods. *Dr̥ṣṭārthāpatti* encourages us to postulate significant philosophical statements in explaining seemingly inexplicable phenomena in Christian philosophy. For example to solve the contradiction in 'a suffering and dying God', the economy of salvation may have to be postulated; to solve the contradiction in 'evil

in us and the world and the good Creator God', we may have to postulate 'human growth to goodness through freedom'. Also like Inference, Postulation can help us in correcting Christian philosophical thinking through the dialectical process of exhaustion (*pariśeṣa*). There is much innovative power for Christian philosophy attainable through *arthāpatti* because many unperceived facts could be discovered by employing this philosophical method. Srutārthāpatti is a significant source of valid knowledge in Biblical and extra-Biblical hermeneutics and exegesis.<sup>84</sup> It involves the assumption of a fact regarding either a verbal expression (*abhidhāna*) or a thing meant by a sentence (*abhihita*) in order to explain a fact known through the scripture. The Indian context will have to postulate important creative insights in unveiling the meaning of the passage for Indians and here there is inter-relation between srutārthāpatti and the lakṣaṇā method.

Non-cognition (*anupalabdhi*) of Indian philosophy as an Indian Christian philosophical method is the source of our immediate knowledge of the non-existence of an object.<sup>85</sup> For example the non-existence of the jar on the table is known from the absence of its cognition. If an object should have been perceived under certain circumstances, then only its non-perception under those circumstances would give the knowledge of its non-existence. There is the possibility of developing a Christian philosophy of non-existents in the realm of existents and it is Non-cognition which will be the *pramāṇa* in doing this. For example, the caste system in India and the consequent socio-economic injustice done to the Dalits are the expressions of the non-existence of goodness and this we know through the valid source of knowledge Non-cognition.<sup>86</sup> This knowledge is the means through which the gospel for such a context is arrived at. Again the *pramāṇa* Non-cognition recommends apophatic Indian Christian philosophy.<sup>87</sup> There are four kinds of non-existence which can be known through the philosophical method Non-cognition. They are *prāgabhāva*<sup>88</sup> or the absence of the effect (*jar*) in its material cause (*clay*) previous to its coming into existence e.g., the absence of Creation in God previous

to its coming into existence; *dhvamsābhāva*<sup>89</sup> which is non-existence as represented by destruction e.g., non-existence of the jar in the broken parts; non-existence of the image of God in the broken humanity due to alienation from God; *atyantābhāva*<sup>90</sup> which is the absolute non-existence of an object in a locus, e.g., absolute non-existence of evil in God; and *anyonābhāva*<sup>91</sup> which is difference or separateness owing to which we judge 'A' is not 'B', e.g., the two thirds-world is not the first-world and vice a versa. These knowledge of non-existences will help us much to decide the content of an Indian Christian philosophy for today.

The perspective taken by us in such an exposition as above involves the use of the understandings of *śabda*, *anumāna* and other *pramāṇas* as expounded by Indian philosophy in the very articulation of Indian Christian *pramāṇas*. This then becomes different from the approach taken by other Indian Christian theologians such as A. J. Appasamy, R. H. S. Boyd, A. P. Nirmal and Paul Gregorios.<sup>92</sup> A. J. Appasamy had the idea that the traditional sources of authority or *pramanas* of Hinduism are *śruti* (scripture), *anumāna* or *yukti* (reason) and *anubhava* or *pratyakṣa* (experience or perception), and these Christians can adapt. To these he adds one of his own namely *sabhā* (church) as the second in the order to make these four as Indian Christian *pramāṇas*. Following the line of thought of A. J. Appasamy, R. H. S. Boyd also presents *śruti* (scripture), *pratyakṣa* or *anubhava* (direct experience) and *yukti* or *anumāna* (inference) as the Indian Christian *pramāṇas* in the context of the Hindu understanding of the *pramāṇas*. A. P. Nirmal only talks about *pratyakṣa* (that which conforms to the empirical) and *anubhava* (that which conforms to the transcendental) which according to him though were originally synonymous, are now in the oppose camps, Lokayatavāda stressing the former and Advaita Vedanta stressing the latter. Indian Christian theological method should adopt a middle path between these two extremes; if *anubhava* has been overemphasized so far, we should give due importance to *pratyakṣa*. According to Paul Gregorios,

pramāṇavicāra constitutes the principles of interpretation laid down by Indian hermeneutics and the three sources of knowledge with which we have usually operated are *pratyakṣa* (sense-perception), *anumāna* (reason) and *śabda* (scripture, tradition or revelation).

The following is our evaluation of the thought of these theologians:<sup>93</sup> (i) None of these theologians mentions anything about the *pramāṇas upamāna*, *arthāpatti* and *anupalabdhi*. (ii) Many of them understand *anubhava* to be a *pramāṇa*; but this is an idea foreign to Indian religious philosophy. *Anubhava* represents the final experience of supreme realization and as such is not a *pramāṇa*. It is the culmination of the knowledge of reality arrived at through the different *pramāṇas*, especially *śabda*. (iii) Some of them equate *pratyakṣa* with *anubhava*, which again is totally unacceptable to Indian philosophy. *pratyakṣa* is purely sense-experience and as such is entirely different from the experience of supreme realization which *anubhava* is. We should not confuse these two. (iv) One cannot add some more *pramāṇas* just like that to the six got fixed through centuries of investigation by the best minds of India; *śabda*(church) cannot be a *pramāṇa* and 'tradition' cannot be presented as one of the meanings of *śabda*. (v) These Indian theologians are not making use of the very understandings of the six *pramāṇas* as expounded by Indian philosophy in articulating them as Indian Christian *pramāṇas*. We should remember that through centuries of discussion within each school as well as centuries of interaction of the schools with one another, the meanings of these *pramāṇas* have been clarified in Indian Philosophy and if an Indian Christian ignores these meanings, that person alone will be the loser.

Our hermeneutical context has a major role to play in arriving at a metaphysics or theology. Indian philosophy, specially Advaita Vedānta can be an important hermeneutical context in India for Christians which we have to take seriously while articulating an Indian Christian philosophical method. Indian epistemology, specially the valid sources

of knowledge (*pramāṇas*), can give us guidance in an Indian Christian philosophical method. A viable theology of religions such as Pluralistic Inclusivism which is all for receiving insights from other religious experiences, whole heartedly supports the articulation of an Indian Christian philosophical method in terms of the *pramāṇas* of Indian philosophy.

### Notes

1. K. P. Aleaz, *The Gospel of Indian Culture*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1994, pp.177-213.
2. Christopher Duraisingh, "Reflections on theological hermeneutics in the Indian context", *The Indian Journal of Theology*, Vol.31, Nos. 3 &4, July-Dec. 1982,p. 259.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 262.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 262-63.
5. K.P. Aleaz, *An Indian Jesus from Śaṅkara's Thought*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1997, pp.10-19; *Dialogical Theologies: Hartford Papers and Other Essays*, Kolkata: Punthi Pustak, 2004, p.183.
6. Christopher Duraisingh, "Reflection on theological hermeneutics in the Indian context", *Op. Cit.*, p. 264.
7. K.P. Aleaz, *Dialogical Theologies: Hartford Papers and Other Essays*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 184-85.
8. Cf. N. K. Devaraja, *An Introduction to Śaṅkara's Theory of Knowledge*, Second Edition, Revised, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1972; K. P. Aleaz, *The Relevance of Relation in Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta*, Delhi: Kant Publications, 1996.
9. Christopher Draisingh, "Indian Hyphenated Christians and Theological Reflections Part II. Alternate mode of theologizing now prevalent in India", *Religion and Society*, Vol. XXVII, No.2, June 1980, pp.84-86. Cf. also Christopher Duraisingh, "An Interpretation of Theological Method in Asia Today" in *African and Asian Contribution to Contemporary Theology: A Report*, ed. by J. S. Mbiti, Bossey: Ecumenical Institute, 1977, pp. 42ff.
10. Christopher Duraisingh, "Indian Hyphenated Christians and Theological Reflections Part II", *Op. Cit.*, pp.85-86.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
12. Arvind P. Nirmal, "Theological Implications of the term 'Indigenous'" in *Dialogue in Community. Essays in Honour of S.J. Samartha*, ed. By C. D. Jathanna, Mangalore: The Karnataka Theological Research Institute, 1982, p. 169.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, p. 170.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 171
16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 172, 174 –77.
19. Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988, p. 52.
20. *Ibid.* Cf. also pp. 83-85.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
25. R. Panikkar, "Indian Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism from the perspective of Interculturation" in *Religious Pluralism. An Indian Christian Perspective*, ed. by Kuncheria Pathil, Delhi: ISPCK, 1991, pp. 269-70.
26. Kuncheria Pathil (ed.), *Religious Pluralism. An Indian Christian Perspective*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 345-46.
27. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trs. G. E. M. Anscombe, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953, pp. 193-208.
28. Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1975; Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, Texas: Fort Worth, 1976.
29. Cf. Leonard Swidler, "A Dialogue on Dialogue" in *Death or Dialogue? From the age of Monologue to the Age of Dialogue* by Leonard Swidler, John B. Cobb Jr., Paul F. Knitter and Monica K. Hellwing, London/Philadelphia: SCM Press/Trinity Press International, 1990, pp. 57-59.
30. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 11/11, Q. 1, art. 2.
31. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion. Human Responses to the Transcendent*, London: Macmillan, 1989, pp. 158-59.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 240-46.
33. S. Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (ed.), *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973, pp.260-68; K. P. Aleaz, "Syadvada: An Indian Contribution to Pluralism", *Bangalore Theological Forum*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 1, June 2001, pp.133-44.
34. Cf. K. P. Aleaz, "Religious Pluralism and Christian Witness- A biblical-Theological Analysis", *Bangalore Theological Forum*, Vol. XXI, No.1, Dec.-March 1990, pp. 48-67; *Harmony of Religions. The Relevance of Swami Vivekananda*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1993, pp.162-65; *Theology of Religions. Birmingham Papers and Other Essays*, Calcutta: Moumita, 1998, pp. 168-99.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 176-80.
36. Cf. K. P. Aleaz, "Conversion: Some Indian Christian Reflections", *NCC Review*, Vol. CXV, No.1, Jan. 1995, pp.28-42. Cf. K. P. Aleaz, *Religions in Christian Theology*, Kolkata: Punthi Pustak, 2001.
37. Cf. K. P. Aleaz, "The Role of Asian Religions in Asian Christian Theology", *Asia Journal of Theology*, Vol. 15, No.2, Oct. 2001, pp.268-87.
38. For example, Christians may maintain that the richness of Advaitic experience can teach them many a things, which they do not possess. Cf. K. P. Aleaz, *The Relevance of Relation in Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta*, Delhi: Kant Publication, 1996.

39. S.J. Samartha, *One Christ Many Religions. Toward a Revised Christology*, Bangalore: Sathri, 1992, pp.36-41.
40. Jesus may be considered as the symbol of self-sacrifice and Advaita Vedānta provides an ideological basis for self-sacrifice. Cf. K. P. Aleaz, *An Indian Jesus from Śaṅkara's Thought*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1997.
41. K. P. Aleaz, *Dimensions of Indian Religion. Study, experience and Interaction*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1995, pp.262-63; "Dialogical Theologies. A Search for an Indian Perspective", *Asia Journal of Theology*, Vol. 6, No.2, Oct. 1992, pp. 274-91; Felix Wilfred, "Some Tentative Reflections on the Language of Christian Uniqueness. An Indian Perspective", *Vidyajyoti*, Vol.57, No.11, Nov. 1993, pp. 652-72.
42. Cf. K. P. Aleaz, *Jesus in Neo-Vedānta – A Meeting of Hinduism and Christianity*, Delhi: Kant Publications, 1995; *An Indian Jesus from Śaṅkara's Thought*, Op. Cit.
43. K.P. Aleaz, *The Role of Pramāṇas in Hindu-Christian Epistemology*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1991, pp. 99-100.
44. Cf. K. P. Aleaz, *Jesus in Neo-Vedanta. A Meeting of Hinduism and Christianity*, Op. Cit.
45. Cf. M. M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of Indian Renaissance*, Madras/Bangalore: CLS/CISRS, 1970.
46. We venture to equate theology with metaphysics on the contention that in India there is no segregation of these two; both are concerned with the general problems of human understanding of reality i.e., human person, universe and God. On the one hand Indian Christian theology is not dogmatic and on the other hand Indian Philosophy accepts Śabda (verbal testimony, scripture) as a *Pramāṇa*.
47. Cf. Satischandra Chatterjee and Dharendra Mohan Datta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1968.
48. Śaṅkara, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad Bhāṣya*, Introduction; 2.4.5; 4.15.5; *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya*, 1.1.2; 2.1.6; 2.1.11; *Bhagavad Gītā Bhāṣya*, 18.66; Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1964, pp. 287-89.
49. K.P. Aleaz, "The Jīva-Brahman Relation in Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta as an Indian Jesulogical Model", D.Th. Thesis, Senate of Serampore College, Serampore, 1984, pp.22-25; 990-91.
50. Susil Kumar Maitra, *Fundamental Questions of Indian Metaphysics and Logic*, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1974, pp. 228-32; D. M. Data, *The Six Ways of Knowing*, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1972, p. 249.
51. Śaṅkara, *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya*, 1. 3. 29; Swami Madhavananda, *Vedānta Paribhāṣa of Dharmaraja Advarindra*, Belur: The Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, 1972, pp. 115-16.
52. Śaṅkara, *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya*, 1. 3. 28, 30; S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy, Vol. II*, Bombay etc.: Blackie & Son Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1983, pp. 106-109, 391.
53. Śaṅkara, *Taittirīya Upaniṣad Bhāṣya*, 2. 3; K. P. Aleaz, "Word and Meaning in Indian Philosophy: Its possible Contribution towards Indian Christian Hermeneutics", *The Indian Journal of Theology*, Vol. 32, Nos. 3 & 4, July-Dec. 1983, pp. 31-42.

54. K.C. Bhattacharyya, "Knowledge and Truth" in *Recent Indian Philosophy. Papers selected from the proceedings of the Indian Philosophical Congress, 1925-1934*, ed. By Kalidas Bhattacharyya, Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 1963, pp. 40-57; N. K. Devaraja, *An Introduction to Śaṅkara's Theory of Knowledge*, Delhi etc.: Motilal Banarsidass, 1972, pp.112-16.
55. Visvanath Nyaya-Pancanana, *Bhāṣā Pariccheda with Siddhānta Mukṭāvali*, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1977, pp. 158-65; D. M. Datta, *Six Ways of Knowing*, *Op. Cit.*, pp.289-94.
56. Bishnupada Bhattacharya, *A Study in Language and Meaning*, Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1984, pp. 135-60.
57. Visvanatha Nyaya-Pancanana, *Bhāṣā-Pariccheda with Siddhānta Mukṭāvali*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 166-72;
58. Swami Nikhilananda, *Vedāntasāra of Sadānanda*, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1978, pp.104-108.
59. Cf. John S. Kselman, "Modern New Testament Criticism", *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Bangalore: TPI, 1982, pp.13-20; Alfred M. Perry, "The Growth of the Gospel", *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. VII, Nashville: Abingdon, 1982, pp.69-74.
60. D. M. Datta, *The Six Ways of Knowing*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 314-17.
61. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy, Vol. II*, *Op. Cit.*, p.318; M. Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, Bombay: George Allen & Unwin (India) Pvt. Ltd., 1973, p. 319; R. V. De Smet, "The Theological Method of Sankara", Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, 1953, pp. 198-217.
62. D.M. Datta, *The Six Ways of Knowing*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 61-72, 81, 132-33; Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy, Vol. I*, Cambridge: The University Press, 1922, pp. 472, 481; William M. Indich, *Consciousness in Advaita Vedanta*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980, pp.36-39.
63. Satischandra Chatterjee and Dharendra Mohan Datta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, *Op. Cit.*, pp.317-18; P. T. Raju, *The Philosophical Traditions of India*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1971, p. 69.
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65. Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1964, p.218.
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67. K.P. Aleaz, *The Role of Pramāṇas in Hindu-Christian Epistemology*, *Op. Cit.*, pp.88-90.
68. Visvanatha Nyaya-Pancanana, *Bhāṣā-Pariccheda with Siddhānta Mukṭāvali*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 105-145; 225-31; Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, *Indian Philosophy*.

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69. D.M. Datta, *Six Ways of Knowing*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 208.
  70. R.V. De Smet, "The Theological Method of Sankara", *Op. Cit.*, pp. 305-306. Cf. Śaṅkara, *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya*, 2.1.9, 2.2.5, 2.2.29, 2.2.21, 2.3.6, 2.3.26; *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad Bhāṣya*, 2.1.5, 3.3.1, etc.
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  72. Swami Abhishiktananda, *Hindu-Christian Meeting Point. Within the Cave of the Heart*, Bombay/Bangalore: The Institute of Indian Culture/CISRS, 1969; Vandana, *Waters of Fire*, Madras: CLS, 1981.
  73. Swami Madhavananda, *Vedānta Paribhāṣā of Dharmaraja Adhvarindra*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 217-19.
  74. *Ibid.*, pp. 83-85; Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy, Vol. I*, *Op. Cit.*, p.391; Satischandra Chatterjee and Dhirendramohan Datta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 319-21.
  75. Prasannabhai, "How Christ is prefigured in the Hindu Scriptures" in *Research Seminar on Non-Biblical Scriptures*, ed. by D. S. Amalorpavadass, Bangalore: NBCLC, 1974, pp.260-78; John L. Makenzi, "Aspects of Old Testament Thought", in *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 736-67.
  76. D.M. Datta, *The Six Ways of Knowing*, *Op. Cit.*, pp.156-57.
  77. Cf. R. D. Ranade, *Vedānta the Culmination of Indian Thought*, Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1970.
  78. D.M. Datta, *Six Ways of Knowing*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 147-49.
  79. *Ibid.*, p. 147; Swami Madhavananda, *Vedānta Paribhasa of Dharmaraja Adhvarindra*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 84-85.
  80. Visvanath Nyaya-Pancanana, *Bhāṣā-Pariccheda with Siddhānta Mukṭāvali*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 146-47; Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 203-204.
  81. M. Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 320-21; Swami Madhavananda, *Vedānta Paribhāṣā of Dharmaraja Adhvarindra*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 117-18
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  84. Cf. Bruce M. Metzger, "The Language of the New Testament", *The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VII*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 53-59; K. P. Aleaz, "Experiencing the Gospel", *Chronicle*, Calcutta: Bishop's College, 1988, pp. 31-42; Raymond E. Brown, "Hermeneutics", *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 605-623; J. G. F. Collison, "Issues in the History of Biblical Hermeneutics: A Protestant Perspective" *The Indian Journal of Theology*, Vol. 31, Nos. 3&4, July-Dec. 1982, p. 233.
  85. D.M. Datta, *The Six Ways of Knowing*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 161-70; S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy, Vol. II*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 394-95.

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87. Cf. R. D. Ranade, *A Constructive Survey of Upanishadic Philosophy*, Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1968; K. P. Aleaz, *A Convergence of Advaita Vedānta and Eastern Christian Thought*, Delhi: ISPCK, 2000.
88. Swami Madhavananda, *Vedānta Paribhāṣā of Dharmaraja Adhvarindra*, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 137-38.
89. *Ibid.*, p.138.
90. *Ibid.*, pp. 139-40; D. M. Datta, *The Six Ways of Knowing*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 181.
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92. Cf. A. J. Appasamy, *What shall we believe? A Study of the Christian Pramāṇas*, Madras etc.: CLS etc., 1971, "The Christian Pramāṇas or the Norms of Theological Thought", *The Indian Journal of Theology*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1953, pp.1-8; R. H. S. Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian theology*, Madras: CLS, 1975, pp.228-32; *India and the Latin Captivity of the Church. The Cultural Context of the Gospel*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1974, pp.76-79; A. P. Nirmal, "Towards a relevant and contemporary theology in India", in *A Vision for Man*, ed by Samuel Amirtham, Madras: CLS, 1978, pp.61-77; Paul Gregorios, "Hermeneutics in India Today in the light of the World Debate", *The Indian Journal of Theology*, Vol. 28, No. 1, Jan.-March 1979, pp. 1-14.
93. Cf. K. P. Aleaz, *The Role of Pramāṇas in Hindu-Christian Epistemology*, *Op. Cit.*, pp.68-76.

## IV

# INDIAN PHILOSOPHY AND THE CONTENT OF AN INDIAN CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

**T**he general theme of these Teape Lectures is ‘Towards a Christian Philosophy through Indian Philosophy’ and this third lecture is specifically on Indian Philosophy and the Content of an Indian Christian Philosophy. Here by philosophy we mean specifically Metaphysics, as matters related to Epistemology we have already discussed in the second lecture in terms of the valid sources of knowledge (*pramāṇas*) and the general features of Indian Philosophy in the first lecture. Metaphysics is the theory of reality, reality implying the total range of reals i.e., human person, Nature and what is beyond these namely God in most cases. To these we may have to add Jesus Christ when we are thinking of an Indian Christian Philosophy. If the first section is on the unknowability of God as well as God as Saccidananda, as an emphasis of an Indian Christian philosophy, the second indicates ways of interpreting Christ, going beyond the atonement theories. The third and forth sections are respectively on an Indian Christian philosophical understanding of creation and human person. Of all the Indian philosophical schools, it is Śankara’s Advaita Vedānta that is found resourceful in providing support for an Indian Christian philosophy. Also, it should be noted that the Indian Christian

philosophy thus constructed naturally gets an affinity with Eastern Christian thought.

### 1. God as Unknowable as well as Saccidānanda.

In the understanding of God, Indian philosophy displays rich diversity. The Heterodox (*Nāstika*) schools Cārvaka (Materialism), Jainism, Hinayāna Buddhism as well as the Orthodox (*Āstika*) schools of the Śāṅkhya in its classical version and to some extent the Mīmāṃsā are atheistic in nature. For Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Yoga as well as Dvaita Vedānta, God is only the efficient cause (*nimitta kāraṇa*) and not the material or reality- providing cause (*upādāna kāraṇa*). For the Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara as well as the Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta of Rāmānuja God is both the efficient cause as well as the material cause as in diverse schools of Christian thought. For Rāmānuja, by virtue of creation there is evolution (*prīṇāna*) in God; creation as the body of God evolves. It is only Advaita which holds on to the *vivaṇṭa vāda* according to which creation is effected without God getting changed and this is the view held by most of the schools of Christian thought as well.<sup>1</sup>

God is unknowable in His/Her essence, nature or inner being and knowable in His/Her energies, operations or acts of grace, life and power. This is a basic affirmation of Eastern Christian theology.<sup>2</sup> Advaita Vedānta can contribute much to this line of thought and that can be an important feature of an Indian Christian philosophy. In the opinion of Advaita Brahman/Ātman is basically unknowable though some Upaniṣadic statements can provide the essential indication (*svārūpa lakṣaṇā*) of Brahman.<sup>3</sup> Brahman is one in whom there is no distinguishing mark such as name (*nāma*) or form (*rūpa*) or action (*karma*) or heterogeneity (*bheda*) or species (*jāti*) or quality (*guṇa*). The functioning of words are through one or other of these. Hence Brahman has to be described as 'not this, not this'.<sup>4</sup> Even words like Brahman, Ātman and Puruṣa cannot exhaust the meaning and significance of the Supreme Reality<sup>5</sup>. Such a conception when received

in Indian Christian philosophy it makes philosophy a contemplation of the mysteries of Reality and thus Christian philosophy ceases to be 'God-talk' or 'God-management. The goal of apophatic Christian philosophy is deification by virtue of the salutary function of the unknowability of God. Unknowability of God leads to union with God.<sup>6</sup> The ultimate concern in Indian Christian philosophy is not to think about being but to 'let being be' in the self-effulgent Pure Consciousness and this is entirely different from the Western conception of theology.<sup>7</sup> In Western tradition, theology is faith seeking understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum*) through reason. Importance is given here to the *logos* as *verbum mentis* or intelligibility and hence theology meant understanding the *logos* as rational intelligibility. Here thinking tells us what being is and the organ of thinking is *logos*. Theology here is the ultimate human wisdom taking into account the self-disclosure of the divine Mystery.<sup>8</sup> Where as in the view of Indian thought theology is a mode of being, theology is participating in being and here Eastern Christian thought comes close to Indian thought. Indian Christian philosophy continues the same line of thinking.

Brahman is beyond speech and mind, cannot be classed with objects of knowledge and is one's inmost Ātman (*pratyagātmabhūtam*). Brahman cannot be perceived because He/She is unmanifest, super-sensuous and the witness (*sākṣin*) of all.<sup>9</sup> The knower cannot be known by the knower, just as fire cannot be consumed by the consuming fire (*agniriva daghumagneḥ*) and there is no other knower different from Brahman to whom Brahman can become a separate knowable.<sup>10</sup> The Ātman constitutes the essence of everything and because of this the mind cannot illumine Him/Her whereas He/She through His/Her light of consciousness can illumine the mind; the Ātman who dwells in the inmost recesses of all (*sarvāntaratamam*) is the source of the capacity of the organs to act. Whatever is perceived, is perceived through the light of Brahman (*brahmaṇaiva jyotiṣopalabhyate*) but Brahman is not perceived through any other light. Brahman reveals all others, but Brahman is not revealed by

them (*na tu brahmānyena vyajyate*).<sup>11</sup> Though unknowable, the existence of Brahman is well known from the fact of His/Her being the Ātman of all (*sarvasyātmatvāt*), the Intelligent unifier of human constitution, the Cause, the source of joy as well as the source of fearlessness<sup>12</sup>. In an emerging Indian Christian philosophy, such would be an apophatic understanding of God.

Even the *svarupa lakṣaṇas* (essential indications) of Brahman-Ātman given in the Upaniṣads cannot define or express who He/She is. While discussing the statement ‘Brahman is Reality, Knowledge and Infinite (*Satyam jñānam anantam Brahmā*)’ (Taittirīya Upaniṣad 2. 1. 1) which is a *svarūpa lakṣaṇā*, Śaṅkara quotes the Sruti texts ‘Failing to reach whom (Brahman) words, along with the mind turn back’ (Ta. U. 2. 4. 1) and ‘Inexpressible and supportless Brahman’ (Ta. U. 2. 7. 1) and says that Brahman is indescribable (*avāccyatvaṁ*) and He/She is not to be construed as the import of any sentence. The words *satyam* and *jñānam* can only indicate Brahman but not express Him/Her (*lakṣyate, na tūcyate*)<sup>13</sup>. The words reality etc. occurring in mutual proximity, and controlling and being controlled in turn by each other, distinguish Brahman from other objects denoted by the words, Reality etc. and thus become fit for indicating Him/Her (*lakṣaṇārthaścha bhavanti*)<sup>14</sup>. The phrase ‘*Satyam Brahma*’ distinguishes Brahman from changeable things (*vikārāt*)<sup>15</sup>. The phrase ‘*jñānam Brahma*’ is used to rule out any agentship of knowing for Brahman and establish Him/Her as the subject of all knowledge. The phrase ‘*anantam Brahma*’ indicates that Brahman is Infinite from the standpoint of space, time and object (*deśataḥ, kālato vastuḥ*)<sup>16</sup>. Brahman is Infinite from the point of view of objects in the sense that there is nothing different from Brahman because He/She is the Cause (*kāraṇa*) of everything. A thing that is different acts as a limitation to another. For when the intellect gets occupied with something, it becomes detached from something else. That limitation is seen in the case of distinct substances (*bhinneṣu vastuṣu*); Brahman is not differentiated in this way<sup>17</sup>. Such a standpoint of Advaita Vedānta is

the proclamation of an understanding of God in an Indian Christian philosophy as well.

At the same time Brahman can be conceived as Sat-cit-ānanda. Brahman is Sat means He/She exists by Himself/Herself. Cit means self-knowledge, knowing oneself without any external intervention. Brahman is Ānanda i.e., supremely happy in his/Her self-colloquy<sup>18</sup> God is Sat (positive being), Cit (consciousness) and Ānanda (bliss) is a basic affirmation of the Upanishads<sup>19</sup> and consequently in an Indian Christian philosophy. Brahman who is Being reproduces His/Her self as Śabda Brahman (*logos*) by *īkṣaṇam* (beholding). The knowing God is mirrored as the known God in the ocean of Cit. Brahman knows Himself/Herself and from that self-knowledge proceeds His/Her eternal beatitude, bliss. If the Eternal Being finds no repose in the Infinite Image of His own being, mirrored in the ocean of His/Her knowledge, then He/She is wanting in perfection. But to say that the Infinite Being is wanting in perfection is a contradiction.<sup>20</sup> Therefore to say that Brahman is Sat-Cit-Ānanda means that Brahman knows Himself and from that self-knowledge proceeds His/Her eternal beatitude. Brahman is in Himself/Herself, by Himself/Herself. He/She is related of necessity only to the Infinite Image of His/Her own Being, mirrored in the ocean of His/Her knowledge. This relation of Being (Sat) to Himself/Herself in self-knowledge (Cit) is one of perfect harmony, self-satisfaction, beatitude, bliss (*ānandaṁ*). Therefore Sat-Cit-Ānanda shows us how Brahman is ineffably blessed in Himself/Herself, blessed in His/Her very nature.<sup>21</sup>

One way of understanding the Christian doctrine of God as Trinity, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit can be: God comprehends Himself/Herself by one act of eternal knowledge. The knowing self is the Father, the known self or the self-begotten by His/Her knowledge is the Son; and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of reciprocal love proceeding from the Father and the Son.<sup>22</sup> God knows Himself/Herself and reposes in Himself/Herself with supreme complacency. God's eternal act finds

an adequate resultant within His/Her own Self; God is not obliged to come in contact with finite beings for the sustenance and satisfaction of His/Her nature. God's knowledge is fully satisfied by the cognition of the Logos, the infinite Image of his Being, begotten by thought and mirrored in the ocean of His/Her substance. His love finds the fullest satisfaction in the boundless complacency with which He/She reposes on his Image and breathes forth the Spirit of Bliss.<sup>23</sup> Therefore the Christian understanding of Trinity is in line with the Vedāntic understanding of Sat-Cit-Ānanda.

The revelation of God in Jesus teaches us that the differentiating note in Divine Knowledge is the response of intelligence. God begets, in thought, His/Her infinite Self-Image and reposes on it with infinite delight while the begotten Self acknowledges responsively His/Her eternal thought-generation. Through Jesus Christ we are able to behold God as He/She is in Himself, living in communion of self-relation within Himself/Herself. Jesus Christ tells us that there is a response of knowledge in the Godhead. God knows His/Her own self-begotten in thought and is known in return by that Begotten Self. Here the inner life of God is revealed. God reproduces in knowledge a co-responding, acknowledging Self-Image, and from this self-colloquy proceeds His/Her Spirit of Love.<sup>24</sup>

For many hundreds of years the word Saccidānanda has been accepted in the spiritual vocabulary of India as one of the best symbols for the innermost mystery of God Himself/ Herself. Equally the word can signify the mystery of the divine presence in the innermost sanctuary of a human person's being.<sup>25</sup> In an individual's depths there is the fundamental intuition of his/her being. It is so pure that it cannot be adequately described. It is precisely here that one meets God, in the mystery at once of one's own being and of God's. In the depths of one's being, the pure being Sat makes one realize that one's very being and existence is nothing other than its own being and existence. It is oneself and infinitely beyond oneself; in the very immanence it is

infinitely transcendent. One is, and one knows that one is. This is the mystery of Cit, the pure awareness of self. Sat and Cit, being and awareness of being share an absolute non-dual relation. When pure self-awareness is sufficiently realized, the whole being is flooded with an inexpressible sense of completion, peace, joy and fullness which is Ānanda.<sup>26</sup>

The experience of awakening to the self is Christ experience.<sup>27</sup> In awaking to himself at the center of his being, Jesus awoke to the Father. And because he is pre-eminently the representative ‘Son of Man’, humanity shares in everything that he does and in all that he achieves. So when deep within himself Jesus awoke to the Father, all the members of the human family are also taken up into this awakening. Jesus Christ achieves for all his brothers and sisters the right to utter their ‘I’ and ‘you’ in perfect truth, within the ‘I’ and ‘you’ which are eternally exchanged between the Father and the Son. And moreover, Holy Spirit is the expression of the mystery of the non-duality of the Father and the Son as well as the expression of the mystery of the non-duality of the whole humanity and the Father actualized in and through the Son.<sup>28</sup>

In Indian Christian philosophy Reality therefore is the eternal procession of self-manifestation, of self-knowledge and the eternal over-flow of bliss. Jesus is the manifestation of this Saccidānanda and this is what is happening in each one of us, if we could only know ourselves. Like Jesus, we are forever coming forth from the Father into the light of self-knowledge and returning to the Father in the bliss of love.<sup>29</sup> Each of us comes forth eternally from the hidden depths of the Father into being in the Word, the Son, the Cit and when we come into being in time we become distinct and separate. The Fall is our fall into this present mode of consciousness, where everything is divided, centered on itself and set in conflict with others. Sin is alienation from our real self; it is to fall into a separate, divided self. Redemption – atonement – is the return to unity; it is awakening to our true being in

the Cit. In Jesus the Cit, the sin, which brought a divided consciousness into the world, is overcome and Nature and humans are restored to their original unity with God. Though there is no duality, there is relationship in the Godhead between the Father, Son and Spirit. Each created being participates in this very relationship. In the knowledge of the One Self, Sat, the individual self does not simply disappear; he/she is a unique center of consciousness in the universal consciousness.<sup>30</sup>

## **2. An Interpretation of Jesus Christ Going beyond the Atonement theories.**

Apart from conceiving Jesus Christ as the representative Cit as we have already noted Indian Christian philosophy is rich with a variety of other possible interpretations. For example we have been told that the role of *īśvara* in Vedānta corresponds functionally to the role of Christ in Christian thought and it is precisely this correspondence that provides Indian philosophy with a locus for Christ and Christian theology for *īśvara*. The Christ of Hinduism is one who is hidden and unknown as the *īśvara* of Vedānta. *īśvara* is the unknown Christ of Hinduism.<sup>31</sup> In Vedānta, the concept *īśvara* is one, which is put forward to explain the problem of the relation between Brahman and World. But Śaṅkara's *īśvara* cannot solve the problem satisfactorily because He/She cannot be a true mediator being real only from the perspective of the world. If in Śaṅkara's Advaita the diversity between Brahman and *īśvara* is overstressed to save the absolute purity of the former, in Rāmānuja's Viśiṣṭādvaita, it is the identity between Brahman and *īśvara* which is overstressed to save the reality of the world and hence again *īśvara* is not a satisfactory "link".<sup>32</sup> Christ can be a true link between the world and God because he is really 'human' without ceasing to be divine and he not only connects the two poles of God and world, but 'is' the two poles without permitting them to coalesce.<sup>33</sup> Christic principle here becomes the center of reality as seen by the Christian tradition in a theanthropocosmic vision.<sup>34</sup>

Advaita Vedāntic conception of the relation between world and Brahman can explain the relation between the human and divine natures in Christ. The *hypostasis* or Person of the Divine *Logos* takes unto Himself/Herself the human nature and the novelty, which follows this actuation, is entirely on the side of the human nature; so also in divine causation, Brahman remains unchanged. Hence Christ's Incarnation is a case of *vivarta*.<sup>35</sup> *Tādātmya* relation denotes the effect's complete dependence upon the Supreme Ātman and hence denotes the relation between creature and creator. It denotes non-reciprocal relation and hence correctly represents the relation in which the *hypostasis* or Person of the Divine *Logos* take unto Himself/Herself the human nature.<sup>36</sup> Christ's experience of '*aham brhmāsmi*' - 'I am Brahman' can be pictured as different from ordinary human person's experience. Human experience of '*aham brahmāsmi*' is the experience that we are totally from Brahman, apart from whom we are non-being; and hence it is not necessarily an experience of Brahman's innermost nature as it is in itself. When Christ says, '*aham brahmāsmi*' the Mystery, Self is expressed or uttered in the inmost reality of its own Being.<sup>37</sup> The advaitin has the concept of sin as *avidyā* i.e., the ascription of a false autonomy to created being. Christ has brought us redemption in the sense that he became the very antithesis of self-assertion taking upon himself all the consequences of human assertion of a false autonomy, even unto death on the cross and drawing the whole creation back to the full recognition of its dependence on its source, the parent God.<sup>38</sup> Jesus accomplished on the Cross Love and Sacrifice in a fitting manner and his Sacrifice on the Cross is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Renunciation or Love and Sacrifice which Christ has taught us through his life is the same as giving up duality which is to forsake the body and ego as well as the material world to find the God behind it.<sup>39</sup>

God is absolutely different from all appearances which creation is and Jesus Christ is God's appearance in the midst of appearances. Christ is God turned towards the appearance, appearing in

appearances. In Christ the absolutely transcendental God serves Himself/Herself from Himself/Herself to produce the appearance and to become appearance.<sup>40</sup> The insight emerging is, in raising the question of the foundations of Christian thought, we must raise the question of Ultimate Reality along with the question of Christ. Wrongly, in Christian thought, history is taken to be the 'place' of Christ. But we must place the event of Jesus as Christ in the Ultimate Reality rather than in history or in the world of humans or in the sphere of action, even if action is construed as that of God. We must raise the question of Ultimate Reality in the Vedāntic fashion and at the same time, and within that question itself, ask about the meaning of Jesus Christ<sup>41</sup>. The meaning of Jesus Christ and Brahman are inexhaustible and at some great depth they meet and interpenetrate and that interpenetration is much more than the so-called indigenization or inculturation.<sup>42</sup> The fact of Jesus has to be internalized according to what is ultimately real; when the mortal facticity of the fact is eliminated it is metamorphosed into truth<sup>43</sup>. Christ is presented here as the redemptive symbol manifesting himself precisely at the point of the non-symbolic ground of Brahman.<sup>44</sup>

An interpretation of the person and function of Jesus is possible from within Advaita Vedānta that enriches Christian experience and we have attempted an elaborate discussion on this elsewhere.<sup>45</sup> The significance of Jesus lies in his denial of any significance for himself through complete self-sacrifice and Advaita Vedānta provides a philosophical basis for this self-sacrifice of Jesus and thus explains his meaning for us: It is Being Himself/Herself who is perceived in a form other than His/Her own namely Jesus and hence we should not make any assumption of anything other than Being at any time or place. For those who know the real character of the rope and clay, the name and idea of serpent and jar cease, in the same manner for those who know the real character of Being, the name and idea of Jesus cease. The total sacrifice of Jesus is the total affirmation of Being. We have to sacrifice ourselves as Jesus did to discover our

reality as Being. Interpretation of the person of Jesus as the extrinsic denominator (*upādhī*), name and form (*nāmarūpa*) and effect (*kārya*) of Brahman affirms this relation of total dependence on the part of Jesus upon Brahman.<sup>46</sup>

In Advaita Vedanta Creation, which includes individual beings, is considered as the extrinsic denominator (*upādhī*) of Brahman. The difference between Jesus and the Supreme Ātman is a creation of the extrinsic denominators like body etc. constituted by name and form; the difference is not from the supreme standpoint. Jesus in his person is able to identify the Supreme Being through the denial of his own person who is the extrinsic denominator of Brahman.<sup>47</sup> Brahman as related to the names and forms of the bodies which form Brahman's extrinsic denominator, are the Jīvas (living beings) and it is this jīva-Brahman relation that is explained by Śaṅkara through the comparisons of pot-space (*ghaṭākāśaḥ*) and Cosmic Space (*mahākāśaḥ*) on the one hand and the reflections (*ābhāsaḥ*) of sun or moon or human person and these on the other. This relation is applicable to Jesus as well. Jesus is the reflection of Brahman. If Brahman is the total space, Jesus is the space inside a pot.<sup>48</sup>

In Advaita Creation is again understood as the name and form (*nāmarūpa*) of Brahman. Therefore Jesus can also be conceived as the name and form of Brahman. Brahman's becoming Jesus does not mean becoming something extraneous to His/Her own essence as one does by begetting a son. Jesus is only the manifestation of name and form that is latent in the Ātman into all the states by retaining its own nature as the Ātman and remaining indistinguishable from Brahman in time and space.<sup>49</sup> The symbol 'son' cannot express the depth of the relation between Jesus and Brahman/Ātman; name and form would be a better symbol and India suggests this through Advaita Vedānta.<sup>50</sup>

As Creation is the effect (*kārya*) of Brahman, Jesus also can be conceived as the effect of Brahman. Despite the non-otherness (*ananyatva*) between Brahman and Jesus, Brahman, the Cause, as

cause is ontologically superior and anterior to Jesus, the effect as effect. Jesus is non-other than Brahman as his internal reality-providing Cause, whereas, Jesus is not non-other than Brahman as his efficient Cause.<sup>51</sup> The relation between Jesus and Brahman is *tādātmya* i.e., non-reciprocal dependence relation: Jesus, the name and form in all his states has his ātman in Brahman alone, but Brahman does not have Jesus as Brahman's Ātman. The entire body of effects including Jesus has no existence apart from Brahman.<sup>52</sup> Brahman as Cause is the root, support, repository, upholder, controller and director of Jesus, the effect.<sup>53</sup>

An understanding of the function of Jesus as emerging from Advaita Vedānta goes beyond the atonement theories through which the Christian church has tried to understand it. The alternative understanding of the function of Jesus is that he re-presents<sup>54</sup> the all-pervasive, illuminative and unificatory power of the Supreme Ātman; he re-presents to us the Supreme Brahman who is Pure Consciousness as the Witness and Ātman of all; and thus he re-presents to us the eternally present human liberation.

The function of Jesus is to show us the Supreme Brahman who is Pure Consciousness as the Witness and Ātman of all.<sup>55</sup> Jesus bears witness that Consciousness is Brahman's own form; that the Ātman should be realized in one form only, i.e., as homogenous Pure Consciousness. He further reveals that Brahman being eternal Consciousness is the Witness of all. The life of Jesus tells us that unless there be some principle running through everything and abiding through all the three periods of time, or some unchanging witness of all, there can be no human dealing involving remembrance, recognition etc. and that principle is the Ātman who is Brahman.

Jesus proclaims the gospel that the Supreme Ātman pervades everything, everywhere, for all times; being all-pervasive like space, Brahman can very well dwell inside everything. The implantation of the Ātman in the five sheaths of human person namely physical, vital,

mental, intelligent and blissful as well as innermost to all of them, we can identify from the life and work of Jesus. The Ātman as witness pervades the sight, hearing, thought and knowledge of Jesus and us. The elements related to Jesus and us perform their activity through the pervasive presence of Brahman-Ātman. Jesus points to the fact that the effect is pervaded and held together by its cause and the Supreme Cause, Brahman-Ātman pervades and holds together everything, though at the same time totally different from all His/Her effects.<sup>56</sup>

The life and work of Jesus also proclaims that as an emerald or any other gem dropped for testing into milk etc. imparts its luster to them, the luminous Ātman unifies and integrates the intellect and all other organs within the human body and imparts His/Her luster to them. The jīvātman of the human representative Jesus is the reflection of the Supreme Ātman in his body, senses, vital force, mind, intellect and ego. The representative intellect of Jesus which is not conscious by itself, being transparent and next to the Ātman easily becomes the reflection of the light of Consciousness of the Ātman. Next comes the mind of Jesus which catches the effulgence of the Consciousness through the intellect, then the organs of Jesus, through contact with his mind and lastly the body of Jesus, through his organs. Thus Jesus witnesses to the gospel that the Ātman pervades, illumines and unifies everything by means of His/Her reflection.<sup>57</sup>

The Ātman unifies all and everything in Him/Her as His/Her homogeneous essence. Jesus stands out in history proclaiming the gospel that the Ātman is the common referent of the universe, its origin and its end; all things are unified in Brahman because the varieties of genus and particulars are not different from Him/Her. Jesus is the visible manifestation of the Ātman's identification with everything; he reminds us that the Ātman cannot be taken apart from anything else.<sup>58</sup> The life and work of Jesus proclaims the unification of the elements, organs, objects, mind, intellect and vital force in the Ātman. In Jesus

we see the organs to be of the same category as the objects and the generalities of these are unified in a general consideration by his mind which in turn is unified in a general cognition by the intellect and this through discrimination is merged in Pure Consciousness. The general functions of the organs of action are again nothing but the vital force of Jesus which in turn is only Pure Consciousness.<sup>59</sup>

The life and work of Jesus re-presents the eternally present (*nityasiddhasvabhāvam*) human liberation as well.<sup>60</sup> It is the witness of Jesus that liberation is an ever-attained fact. Liberation is the cessation of bondage and not the production of any fresh result; it is simultaneous with the rise of complete illumination; it is a matter of immediate direct result, the result of knowledge being a matter of direct experience. Liberation as we experience in Jesus is the removal of ignorance and the affirmation of one's own real nature which is the Ātman who is beyond acceptance and rejection. The life of Jesus affirms that the knowledge of the innermost Ātman becomes possible for the whole humanity when the ego vanishes; when the identification of other things as Ātman is destroyed, the experience of the Ātman as one's own Ātman which is natural alone will remain. A life centered on our innermost Reality Ātman, consequently, is the liberated life as proclaimed by Jesus.

### 3. An Indian Christian Philosophical Understanding of Creation.

Indian Christian thought upholds the reality of the objective world. It also holds the ontological (*pāramārthika*) nothingness of the finite. God is both the internal reality-providing cause as well as the efficient cause of the universe.<sup>61</sup> The origin of this world does not lie in the substantial differentiation or modification of the supreme cause. There can be no division or change in God. The world has originated by *vivarta*, a kind of communication which does not modify the communicator. Creation is by *vivarta* means creation is by will-causation.<sup>62</sup> This is the meaning of *māyā*. *Māyā* means that creation

is by the power (*śakti*) of the will (*sankalpa*) of God. Creation is *māyā* implies the following insights: (a) God is not necessarily a creator. Creation arises from God's freedom. Creation is the effect of the divine thought. And it manifests the perfections of the Infinite and Absolute Being. Creation can be thought of as the overflow of the abundance of Brahman to manifest and impart His/Her own perfections. Creation is through the overflow of the perfections of God. (b) Creation has no being in itself; what it has is derived being. Creatures are non-beings, transformed as it were into being. Creation's being is totally derived from God. Creation, which includes all living beings, apart from God, is mere nothingness. The transformation from non-being into being is caused by the mysterious power of the will of God.<sup>63</sup>

The Christian revelation of Being as Trinity gives us insight into the mystery of creation. It is true that we cannot explain how God calls into being humankind, for the divine freedom is beyond our power to question. Creation is the overflow of the freedom and love of God. It is in Jesus Cit that all things subsist, everything holds together. The desire of creation freely proceeds from the Cit. In fact nothing can be said to be 'exterior' to God. In reality neither creation nor incarnation takes place outside God, any more than the redemption of the world or the salvation of the individual. All these reveal and express the very heart of God's love.<sup>64</sup> It is only in the heart of God that the antinomy of created existence can and must be resolved. Creation is the communication of the mysterious life of God in Himself/Herself; the mysterious presence of God to Himself/Herself, the presence of the Father to the Son and of the Son to the Father, and the mutual presence of both to the Holy Spirit. We could even venture to say that God's manifestation in His/Her creation is a kind of interior expansion or extension of the divine processions and the eternal mutual indwelling. The revelation of the Trinity as Saccidānanda means that there is no distinction between God and His/Her self-manifestation in the mystery of His/Her inner being. Creation is the 'expansion' of His/Her inner

self-manifestation. When God creates, He/She always engages Himself/Herself in the fullness of His/Her mystery. Since by nature He/She is indivisible, His/Her manifestation cannot possibly involve only a part of Himself/Herself. He/She is totally present in His/Her infinity in the smallest moment of passing time or the least particle of matter in the stream of becoming.<sup>65</sup> An Indian Christian philosopher sees creation as the epiphany of God's mystery and knows that all things are on their way back to the Father through Christ in the Spirit. The mystery of the Holy Trinity reveals that Being is essentially a *koinonia* of love.; it is communion, a reciprocal call to be; its essence is a coming-from and a going-to, a giving and receiving. All that is, is communion, extending from the Father, the Source of all, to the Spirit, the consummation of all, and again extending from the human nature that was hypostatically united to the Word down to the lowest element in the universe.<sup>66</sup>

Along with Śaṅkara Indian Christian philosophy holds that Brahman created the entire universe in due order without the help of any substance other than Himself/Herself. As a result, the whole universe is Brahman alone. The reality of the universe is totally from Brahman. If we consider the universe as something other than Brahman, it is such a conception, which is ignorance (*avidyā*). The world originates, lives and is absorbed in Brahman. At all three points of time the world remains in Brahman, undifferentiated from Him/Her, it is never perceived apart from Brahman. Creation is the effect (*kārya*), extrinsic denominator (*upādhi*) and name and form (*nāma rūpa*) of Brahman.<sup>67</sup> For Śaṅkara in their particular forms though things are unreal, they are real in the form of pure Being. It is Being Himself/Herself (*sateva*) who is perceived in a form other than His/Her own through duality and diversity and there is no non-existence (*nāsatvam*) of anything, anywhere. Whatever there is in the form of name or named – which is thought to be something different – all this is Being only. All modifications which are name and form are real by the Ātman who is real and left to themselves they are unreal. This basic affirmation also

hints at the Eastern Christian theological understanding of the self-sacrifice of God, the self-emptying of God in Christ involved in the ongoing process of creation. The loving, sacrificial involvement of God manifest in the incarnation is implicit from the first moment of creation. The paradox of Christ making the whole creation his body by the kenotic act of dispossessing the lower self sets the paradigm for a Christian approach to creation. The self-sacrifice of Christ affirms Being; and derivatively affirms creation's reality as Being and for this Advaita provides an ideological basis.<sup>68</sup>

This Advaita understanding of creation further enlightens the creation *ex nihilo* interpretation of Christian thought. By creation *ex nihilo* God makes room for something which is wholly outside of Himself/Herself; He/She sets up the 'outside' or nothingness alongside of His/Her plentitude. Nihil means here simply that 'before' creation nothing existed 'outside' of God. Or rather that this 'outside' and this 'before' are absurd, since it is precisely the creation which posits them. Creation is the work of will, and consequently is not co-eternal with God. That which is brought from not-being into being cannot be co-eternal with that which exists always and without origin. In Advaita language what the world has is only relative reality.<sup>69</sup> The whole series of causes and effects, which constitute the phenomenal existence, being changeful, are not absolutely real (*vastusat*). This does not mean Śaṅkara subscribes to the Buddhist view that objects are non-existent. The Śruti declares the products to be real in the sense they are not meant to be absolutely real, but real only in the realm of the objects of senses. Sublation of the universe of manifestation does not mean annihilation of body and earth which is impossible, but it means the destruction through knowledge of the ignorant view of the world of name and form created in Brahman. In his argument against the Buddhists, Śaṅkara strongly argues for the substantial reality of the universe saying that the perceptions of the waking state cannot be classed with those in dream. Māyā only means that if we understand

the organs or the objects as the Supreme Lord that is illusion and we are under ignorance.<sup>70</sup>

The Indian Christian philosophy in line with Advaita Vedānta proclaims that the Brahman/Ātman as cause is the root (*mūlam*) of the universe. It is again the Supreme Brahman who is the support (*dhṛtiḥ*), repository (*āyatanam*) and impounder (one who holds in position) (*vidhāraṇakāvatvam*) of the universe. Also, Brahman is the controller (*adhyakṣaḥ*) and director (*prerayita*) of all the effects.<sup>71</sup> Brahman is absolutely free. He/She creates freely, not out of any need or want. He/She creates without the help of any external materials or instruments. He/She creates by mere intention and totally out of Himself/Herself without becoming modified internally or acquiring any real external relation. Due to His/Her independence (*svātantryā*) Brahman cannot be impelled by desires, for in Him/Her desires are essentially Reality-Knowledge and pure in virtue of their being their own Ātman.<sup>72</sup>

Such a perception gives new dimensions of meaning to Eastern Christian as well as Indian Christian understanding of creation. It is conceived in Eastern Christian thought that while essentially unchangeable, God is becoming the creator of the world in time through His/Her 'energy'. The ideas of created things in God are dynamic and intentional and their place is not in the essence but in the energies of God.<sup>73</sup> The divine 'willings' are creative ideas of things, the *logos*, the words, the words of creation found in Genesis and Psalms. The will of God is ontologically distinct from the nature of God. Creation is an act of the will of God, which means that God remains absolutely free to create or not to create and remains transcendent to the world after creating it. In the Biblical conception of creation, absolute divine transcendence and freedom is maintained in the act of creation. The divine providence which gave being to the world through the *logoi* maintains it in existence giving total freedom to the world's own created dynamism. Every created thing has its point of contact with the Godhead and this point of contact is its idea, reason or *logos* which is at the

same time the end towards which it tends. The ideas of individual things are contained within the higher and more general ideas, as are the species within a genus. The whole is contained in the *logos*, the second person of the Trinity who is the first principle and the last end of all created things.<sup>74</sup>

Here the Advaita Vedāntic idea that before creation this universe was in Brahman as undifferentiated name and form can clarify matters further regarding Eastern Christian as well as Indian Christian understanding of creation. The undifferentiated name and form is parallel to the energies of God in creation. In the beginning, i.e., in its previous condition (*prāgavasthāyām*), it had its name and form undifferentiated (*avyakṛtanāmarūpa*), not that it did not exist at all (*na tvasadeva*). The creation pre-existed in Brahman as potential seed (*bījaśaktiḥ*). Those objects which form the content of God's knowledge (*īśvarajñānasya viśayaḥ*) before creation are the unmanifested name and form which cannot be described either as different or non-different from Brahman and which are about to become manifested. When name and form existing latent in the Ātman, get manifested, they evolve into all the states by retaining their own nature as the ātman and remaining indistinguishable from Brahman in time and space.<sup>75</sup>

#### 4. Human Person in Indian Christian Philosophy

Advaita Vedānta stands for an integral Brahman-human-Creation relationship and Indian Christian philosophy wholeheartedly receives this insight. It destroys the distorted notions of Brahman as alienated from humans and the universe, of humans as alienated from Brahman and the universe, of the universe as alienated from Brahman and humans. Perception as a source of valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*) is the proclamation of this fact. There is an unbroken continuum between living beings and the external world. Humans are integrally related to the world in which they live. This is because the material world as well as the material body is constituted by the same five elements

(*pañcabhūta*) and each sense-organ (*indriya*) is composed of the same substance, the quality of which is sensed by it. The five elements earth, water, fire, air and ether have the qualities of smell, taste, colour or form, touch and sound respectively and the five sense-organs which receive the impressions of these qualities are themselves constituted by these elements respectively.<sup>76</sup> Thus sense-perception is the expression of the solidarity that exists between humans and creation. We are one with the world and Indian Christian philosophy in line with Advaita affirms this fact through perception. We cannot but be integrally related to the universe. The moment we are alienated from Nature, there will occur distortions not only in us, but in Nature as well and the exploitation of Nature will only result in our self-destruction.

Perception for Advaita and Indian Christian philosophy is not only the affirmation of the integral relation that exists between humans and creation, but also the affirmation of the integral relation that exists between the Brahman/Ātman, humans and creation. The Ātman in its transcendent aspect of self-shining consciousness is responsible for the immediacy that we experience in perception. In all knowledge there is present the self-shining transcendent light of Ātman who imparts His/Her immediacy to the object and the knowledge of the object. It is the Ātman who reveals the objects. In perception the object whose form the *antaḥkarana* (the mind-intellect-ego combine) takes is revealed through the light of the Ātman. In the perception of an external object the mind goes out to the object through the senses and on reaching the object the mind assumes its form. The mind is unconscious and so its modification into the form of the object alone cannot result in knowledge. The modification (*vṛtti*) of the mind is always illumined by the Ātman who is Pure Consciousness and Witness (*sākṣin*). Ātman pervades, illumines and unifies all the layers and levels of human personality and the material world and perception as a source of valid knowledge is the affirmation of this good news proclaimed by Advaita Vedānta and Indian Christian philosophy.<sup>77</sup>

This is cosmotheandric intuition. The relationship of God, human person, and cosmos is neither the relationship of three objects, nor of three subjects, nor even that of one Supreme Subject, with one or two objects. All of reality has three constitutive dimensions which are present and real in everything that is. There is nothing only divine, or only human or only cosmic. Everything that is has a dimension of matter, energy, solidity, space, time; as well as one of mind, consciousness, and thirdly one of infinity, unpredictability, radical novelty, and inexhaustible possibilities.<sup>78</sup>

In line with Advaita, Indian Christian philosophy interprets a human person as a *jīvātman* (individual soul) plus inner senses, outer senses and body conjoined. *Jīvātman* is a reflection (*ābhāsa*) of the Supreme *Ātman* in the mirror-like ego-sense. Its prototype is the Supreme *Ātman*. It can find its truth not in itself but only in its prototype which is its true *vastu* (being). In this sense it is not *svārtha* (for itself) but *prārtha* (for the other). It is unequal to its cause and prototype. Still it is not an illusion but an ontologically relative and dependent contingent entity. Though similar to the Supreme *Ātman* in imitated centrality, consciousness, freedom, etc., a *jīvātman* also shares in its reflector's finiteness, mobility, etc. The Paramātman imparts its luster to the body and organs including the intellect, etc. through its *ābhāsa*, the *jīvātman*. The existential unity of a person derives absolutely from the innermost *Ātman* through the mediation of its reflection, the individual *ātman*, which diffuses it into the *buddhi* (intellect), *manas* (mind), *indriyas* (senses), and *sarīra* (body). Human person thus is an integrated contingent being totally dependent on the Absolute.<sup>79</sup>

Though all beings are modifications of the essence of food as well as equally descendants of Brahman, still human person (*puruṣa*) has a pre-eminence (*prādhānyam*) as compared to others. The pre-eminence of human person lies in his/her competence for action and knowledge (*karmajñānādhikārah*). Only human birth is the means of attaining human goals (*puruṣārtha*). The scripture is concerned

with human beings. Though the scripture speaks impartially, still it postulates the competence (*adhikāra*) of human beings only (*manuṣyaneva*), because human beings are able, desirous and not debarred. From a clump of grass, to humans there is a stage by stage increase, successively all through the series, in their power to manifest knowledge and glory. Further, there is equality of all humans in the realm of knowledge and liberation. There is no distinction of superiority (*adhikata*) or inferiority (*nyunata*) of individuals in the state of realization of Brahman, in the immortality (*amṛtatva*) attained.<sup>80</sup>

The image of God in humanity is seen in Eastern Christian theology not in terms of a domineering figure over against creation, but in human goodness, self-discipline, justice, freedom and love. A royal character is attributed to humanity and the domination of human nature over the rest of creation is underlined by virtue of human freedom. Advaita Vedānta here further clarifies matters by saying that human person has a pre-eminence (*prādhānyam*) compared to all other *jīvas* because of his/her competence for action and knowledge (*karmajñānādhi-kāraḥ*).<sup>81</sup> Human freedom has to be exercised in goodness, in the control of will and the practice of love and justice. Image does not mean owning or possessing but nurturing the good through self-sacrifice, self-emptying, an activity that always foster life, an exercise of freedom that is synergic with the creative spirit of God. The image of God signifies the possibility for the human self to open up to infinite dimensions in the very heart of reality, in the very heart of creation. The image of God is the very essence of human person while 'likeness' points to the ethical beings of human person. If 'image' signifies human potentiality for life in God, 'likeness' points to the realization of that potentiality. The image is that which a person possesses from the beginning; whereas likeness is that which is attained at the end of the journey by the grace of God. Likeness in Advaitic terms points to the realization of the Brahman/Ātman, while image signifies the reflection of Brahman/Ātman in human personality starting with the intellect.<sup>82</sup>

Sometimes the Greek Fathers associate the divine image in human person with the totality of his/her nature, considered as a trinity of spirit, soul and body. At other times they connect the image more specifically with the highest aspect of a person, with spirit or spiritual intellect through which he/she attains knowledge of God and union with Him/Her. Advaita can agree with both, as image or reflection of Brahman/Ātman though begins with the intellect or heart, is pervaded to mind, senses and body as well. The soul (psyche) of Eastern Christian theology is the life-force; that which is endowed with consciousness and the power of reasoning. The Advaita Vedāntic parallel of soul would be the *jīvātman* which is a reflection of the *paramātman*. The picturing of the human person in the trichotomist scheme namely spirit (or mind i.e., *nous*), soul and body of Eastern Christian theology is directly connected with the notion of participation in God which is the basis of anthropology and Advaita is all for the same. The spirit represents the ability which human person possesses to transcend oneself in order to participate in God. It is the seat of human hypostasis which contains in itself the whole of human nature namely spirit, soul and body. This is the reason the spirit is identified with the image of God in human person. The spirit has to be united with the heart, the center of human being. Sometimes human nature is described as the union of soul and body, in which case the spirit is understood as a superior faculty of the reasonable soul, to enter into communion with God. The spirit finds its sustenance in God, the soul feeds on the spirit and the body lives on the soul. In Advaita Vedāntic terms spirit would mean the pre-eminence of human person compared to other *jīvas* because of his/her competence for action and knowledge. Through spirit, which is sometimes termed as *nous* or spiritual intellect, a person understands eternal truth about God and enters into communion with Him/Her. Spirit represents the potentiality for human liberation. Eastern Christian theology and Advaita Vedānta thus converge and that convergence is simultaneously the emergence of an Indian Christian philosophy.<sup>83</sup>

In Eastern Christian thought as well as Indian Christian philosophy the inheritance of the Fall is essentially an inheritance of mortality rather than of sinfulness, sinfulness being merely a consequence of mortality. This is quite in line with the Advaitic interpretation of human person with body, senses, mind and intellect as mortal; immortality being that of Brahman/Ātman. It is only when the Ātman is circumscribed by the body and the sense-organs (*dehēndriya-viśiṣṭam*) that evil (*pāpma*) touches (*spraśati*) him/her by bringing to him/her pleasure and pain (*sukhaduhkha*) but when he/she reaches his/her own state of integral relationship with Being (*satsampannam svarūpāvasthām*) no evil dares touch him/her. Evil or sin lies in conceiving due to ignorance (*avidyā*) the body, sense, mind or intellect as the Absolute, instead of the one Supreme Reality, Brahman/Ātman as the Absolute. The right perspective would be to understand that body, senses, mind, intellect or the whole material world have their reality derived totally from Brahman/Ātman; apart from Brahman/Ātman these are mere nothingness.<sup>84</sup>

Advaita enables Indian Christian philosophy to affirm that there is always total dependence on the part of humans upon Brahman/Ātman. Human person who is the name and form of Brahman, is real by Satātman (*sadātmanā satyatvabhūpagamāt*). He/She is not real by himself/herself. Left to himself/herself in isolation from the Supreme Brahman he/she becomes non-existent (*vyatirekeṇābhāvaḥ*). The reality of all activities and all modifications are through *satātman* (*sadātmanā sarvavyavahārāṇām sarvavikārāṇām ca satyatvam*).<sup>85</sup> Also, Brahman/Ātman as Cause is ontologically superior and anterior to *jīva*, the effect. The relation between the effects and the Cause is *tādātmya* relation. *Tādātmya* is non-reciprocal dependence relation because the word means ‘having that (tat) as one’s Ātman’ and hence, it is not correct to translate it as ‘identity’. Names and forms in all their states have their Ātman as Brahman alone (*brahmaṇaivātma-vati*) but Brahman does not have them as His/Her Ātman (*na brahma*

*tad ātmakam*). The jīva-Brahman relation expounded through pot-space (*ghaṭāk āśaḥ*) and reflection (*ābhāsa*) also points to the fact that human person is totally dependent on his/her Cause, Brahman/Ātman.<sup>86</sup>

According to Eastern Christian thought human person is given the freedom of choosing the being and goodness given to it or the opposite namely non-being and evil. Only in free choice does good actually become good. To be in the image of God is to be a personal being, i.e., a free responsible being. Orthodox thought understands the fall of human nature as the direct consequences of the free self-determination. Same is the view of Advaita Vedānta as well as Indian Christian philosophy according to which the intellect or heart represents the faculty of determination or decision (*adhyavasāyati*). The function of the intellect (*buddhi*) as the internal organ (*arītaḥkaraṇam*) is to discriminate between right and wrong. A person is human person only so long as his/her internal organ is competent to discriminate between right and wrong. When unable to do so, the person is utterly ruined; he/she is debarred from attaining human goals.<sup>87</sup>

Brahman/Ātman is knowable in His/Her energies or operations of pervasion, illumination and unification. Brahman/Ātman pervades, illumines and unifies all the levels and layers of human personality effecting deification. This is the view of Eastern Christian theology, Advaita Vedānta and Indian Christian philosophy. The five human sheaths (*pancakośaḥ*) are physical, vital, mental, intelligent and blissful and the Ātman is implanted (*mayāḥ*) in each of them as well as innermost to all of them. The deification of humans is in terms of this implantation. Brahman/Ātman illumines the whole of human person and the total creation. This illumination also can be conceived as effecting deification. As an emerald or any other gem dropped for testing into milk etc. imparts its lustre to them so the luminous Ātman unifies and integrates the intellect and all other organs within the body and imparts His/Her lustre to them.<sup>88</sup>

• God is simultaneously unknowable and Trinity as Saccidānanda. Jesus is the most beautiful representation of the ever-existing integral relation between God and creation, which includes humans. The being of the universe and humans is totally derived from God; apart from God they are mere nothingness. These are some of the indications of a possible Indian Christian philosophy that emerges from Indian philosophy.

### Notes

1. Cf. Satishchandra Chatterjee and Dhirendramohan Datta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1984; S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy Vols. I & II*, Bombay etc. : Blackie & sons, 1985; Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1964.
2. Cf. John Meyendorff, *The Byzantine Legacy in the Orthodox Church*, New York: Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982; Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, London: Mowbrays, 1979; Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, London: James Clark & Co. Ltd., 1957.
3. Śaṅkara, *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* (B. S. B.), 1. 3. 25. Cf. *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2. 1; *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6. 8. 7; *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1. 4. 10; 2. 5. 19; K. P. Aleaz, *A Convergence of Advaita Vedānta and Eastern Christian Thought*, Delhi: ISPCK, 2000, pp. 120-30.
4. Śaṅkara, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad Bhāṣya* (Br. U. B.), 2. 3. 6.
5. Br. U. B., 4.4.25; *Aitareya Upaniṣad Bhāṣya* (Ai. U. B.), 1.1.1; *Praśna Upaniṣad Bhāṣya* (Pr. U. B.), 4.9.
6. K.M. George, *The Silent Roots. Orthodox Perspectives on Christian Spirituality*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994. Risk Book Series No. 63, pp. ix, 5-7.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 3.; Cf. R. Panikkar, "Indian Theology: A Theological Mutation" in *Theologizing in India*, ed. by M. Amaladoss et al, Bangalore: TPI, 1981, pp. 32-34.
8. *Ibid.*
9. B. S. B., 3. 2. 22, 23.
10. Śaṅkara, *Kena Upaniṣad Bhāṣya* (Ke. U. B.), 2.1.
11. Ke. U. B., 1. 2, 6; B. S. B., 1. 3. 22.
12. Śaṅkara, *Taittirīya Upaniṣad Bhāṣya*, (Ta. U. B.), 2. 7. 1; B. S. B., 1. 1. 1.
13. Ta. U. B., 2. 1. 1.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. Brahmabandav Upadhyaya, "Notes", *Sophya*, Vol. I, No. 2, June 23, 1900, p.7.
19. B. Upadhyaya, "An Exposition of Catholic Belief as Compared with the Vedanta", *Sophia*, Vol. V, No. 1, Jan. 1898, pp. 11-14; "A Vedantic Parable", *Sophia*, Vol. V, No. 8, Aug. 1898, p.119; "Cit", *Sophia*, Vol. Vi, No. 3, March 1899, p. 238.
20. B. Upadhyaya, "Being", *Sophia*, Vol. I, No. 7, July 28, 1900, p.7.
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## V

# CONCLUSION

Indian philosophy is mostly religious philosophy. It is integrally related to Indian religions namely Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. There is an integral relation between reason and revelation in Indian philosophy. Scripture (*śabda*) is accepted as a valid source of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) in Indian epistemology. In India, philosophy is called *darśana*, which means vision or intuition of Truth or Reality. The vision of Reality enlightens and transforms a person; he/she is able to reorient life in terms of that Reality. Realization of Truth enables to overcome ignorance and actualize liberation. Indian philosophy thus involves the totality of life and its transformation, and not just human rationality as in the case of many a Western philosophy. The quest for Reality, which is the sphere of philosophy, is inseparably connected with Indian religious experience. The culmination of *vaidika-dharma* or religion developed from the Vedas is Vedānta, an important school of Indian philosophy that emphasizes the realization of Ultimate Reality, Brahman/Ātman. Thus Indian philosophy is an applied discipline for human transformation and not a merely theoretical one.

Indian philosophy is more than Hindu philosophy. Schools which reject Vedic authority, the *nāstika* or Heterodox namely the Cārvaka

or Materialist, the Bauddha and the Jaina are also part of it. Hence the scope for Indian Christian philosophy as a distinctive school within it. The Orthodox or *āstika*, the schools which accept Vedic authority are six namely Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta. Of these the last two are directly based on the Vedic texts. While the Mīmāṃsā school emphasized the ritualistic aspect of the Vedas i.e., the Brāhmaṇas, the Vedānta focused upon the speculative and meditative aspect of the Vedas, i.e., the Upaniṣads. The disinterested performance of the obligatory rites gradually destroys the *karmas* and brings about liberation after death, is the view of the Mīmāṃsa school which has an important contribution in Vedic hermeneutics. Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita are two major schools within Vedānta. For Advaita, Reality is non-dual. Brahman/Ātman is the only Supreme Reality and creation's reality is totally derived from Brahman/Ātman. According to Viśiṣṭādvaita though God is the only Reality, within God exists as parts matter and souls which together form the body of God. The Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika are allied systems. According to these God is only the efficient cause who creates the world out of eternal atoms, space, time, ether, mind and souls. Consciousness is not an essential quality, but accidental which ceases to qualify the soul in the state of liberation. If epistemology, specially Inference, is the emphasis of Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika gives importance to the seven categories (*padārthas*) under which all objects are classified namely substance, quality, action, generality, particularity, the relation of inherence and non-existence. Sāṅkhya and Yoga are again sister systems upholding a dualism of puruṣa (soul) and prakṛti (matter). Prakṛti evolves into the twenty-four principles of creation when associated with puruṣa. If Sāṅkhya provides the theory, Yoga's focus is on practice, on spiritual training to attain discriminative knowledge (*vivekajñāna*) for liberation. The individual soul or puruṣa due to ignorance confuses itself with the body, senses, mind, intellect and ego which are evolutes of prakṛti and this is bondage and the cause of suffering, while discriminative knowledge attained through the eightfold means of Yoga is liberation.

When we consider the Hindu-Christian meeting at the level of Indian philosophy till today, we see that both Krishna Mohun Banerjea and Nehemiah Goreh rejected as defective the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika contention of the souls and atoms of the four elements as self-existent, God as only the efficient cause, and emancipation as total unconsciousness. John Vattanky has upheld as significant the Navya-Nyāya contention that human intellect has infinite capacity to reach out to the ultimate. Krishna Mohun had problem with Sāṅkhya prakṛti as the equipoise of the three *guṇas* and Goreh was not satisfied with the understanding that cognition, will, activity, happiness and misery are the affections of the internal organ which is an evolute of prakṛti. Both rejected the atheism of Sāṅkhya. The distinctiveness of Patañjali's Yoga philosophy as separation of matter from soul is not upheld by Christian thinkers such as Swami Abhishiktananda, Vandana, Thomas Matus, Thomas Manickam and A. S. Appasami Pillai in their responses to Yoga. They confuse Yoga with union with God as diversely experienced in Vedāntic, Śaiva Siddhāntic and Śākta Yogas, as well as in the Yogas of Bhagavad Gītā namely karma, bhakti and jñāna. There is a possibility to use the Mīmāṃsā-Vedānta insights such as the eternality of the word (*śabda*), the meaning of a word refers to the universal and not to the individual etc. in the very understanding and interpretation of the Bible in the Indian context as indicated by the present author. But the Roman Catholic scholars like Francis X. D'Sa have opted for the *Dhvani* interpretation, ignoring the possibility of the *śabda* interpretation. In relation to the Bhakti of Rāmānuja's Viśiṣṭādvaita, A. J. Appasamy emphasized the experience of the living Christ in the depth of the soul. Ignatius Puthiadam showed that if we consider the order of beings, God is the center for both Madhva's Dvaita and Thomas Aquinas. Many have developed Christian thought in relation to Śaṅkara's Advaita. Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya interpreted Trinity as Saccidānanda as well as creation as māyā. For Carl Keller Jesus Christ is God's appearance in the midst of appearances. In the view of K. Subha Rao renunciation or love and

sacrifice, which Christ has taught us through his life, is the same as giving up duality, which is to forsake the body to find the God behind it. J.G. Arapura emphasized that the meaning of Jesus has to be arrived at within the question of Ultimate Reality raised by Vedānta. R. V. De Smet opined that Christ's incarnation is a case of *vivarta*. Abhishiktananda experienced the saving Christ as pure self-awareness. Raimundo Panikkar thought that the role of *īśvara* in Vedānta corresponds functionally to the role of Christ in Christian thought. For the present author Jesus is the name and form, and reflection of Brahman and the function of Jesus is to re-present the all-pervasive, illuminative and unifying power of the Supreme Ātman.

The method of an Indian Christian philosophy is in terms of the *pramāṇas* (valid sources of knowledge) of Indian epistemology taking into consideration the significance of hermeneutics and a viable theology of religions. Hermeneutics or understanding and interpretation upholds the fact that knowledge is formulated in the very knowing process and Indian Christian philosophy is a continuous integrated process involving creation, humans and their Innermost Ātman or God simultaneously. Therefore Inculturation, Indigenization or Contextualisation of the gospel is an unreality; what really happens is the opposite i.e., gospelation of the hermeneutical context or experiencing the emerging gospel from within a hermeneutical context. The context decides the content of what we understand. What I am, what my background is, what my community's history is, what my nation's history is, is my hermeneutical context and that determines what I understand and interpret. Understanding and interpretation belongs exclusively to us and to our context. Christian thought is not pre-formulated, but is always in the process of formulation. There is always the emergence of the new in the understanding of the person and function of Jesus. In our knowing-process there exists nothing externally ready made that can be adapted, indigenized, incultured or contextualised. Indigenization of the gospel implies the wrong notions that the gospel is something foreign. Christian theology is translation

of the Christian faith into a given situation and the gospel as well as history is static. Cultural incursions in Asia have religious consequences; not Inculturation but Enreligionization is what naturally happens. The very word 'inculturation' is based on the culture-religion dichotomy of the Latins where it means the insertion of 'the Christian religion minus European culture' into an 'Asian culture minus non-Christian religion'. This is inconceivable in the South Asian context. What happens there is not just inculturation but enreligionization. Such an understanding of hermeneutics in Indian Christian philosophy is in line with the insights imparted by people like Wittgenstein, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and Karl Mannheim. Also, Thomas Aquinas, Immanuel Kant and above all the Syādvāda of Jainism of India ratify such a perception of hermeneutics.

Theological method raises the issue of a viable theology of religions, which we have identified as Pluralistic Inclusivism and which is different from Exclusivism, Inclusivism and Pluralism. Pluralistic Inclusivism inspires each religious faith to be pluralistically inclusive i.e., on the one hand each living faith is to become truly pluralistic by other faiths contributing to its conceptual content and on the other Inclusivism is to transform its meaning to witness the fulfillment of the theological and spiritual contents of one's own faith in and through the contributions of other living faiths. Pluralistic Inclusivism is a perspective in inter-religious relations in which all the religious resources of the world are considered as the common property of the whole humanity. All religious experiences and traditions are simultaneously ours. It is the affirmation of the inter-connected identity and uniqueness of all religious experiences as our own and here our witness is to a world faith and our theology is a world theology. Again, Pluralistic Inclusivism suggests the relational convergence of religions. An important aspect of a relational convergence of religions is mutual conversion. In the very conversion to Jesus in India, there is a conversion to the religio-cultural context of India, effecting thus a double conversion. Here we are challenged to evolve a more comprehensive role for other religions in

Christian experience than what has been envisaged in the past. How the comprehensive religious life of people of other faiths is related to the gospel of God in Jesus is the basic question to be answered in the third millennium. Also, there is growth in the richness of religious experiences by mutual sharing and separate tendency in religious experience is discouraged by Pluralistic Inclusivism. Different religions will contribute to each other in arriving at the content of the faith-experience of each. The different 'paths' are no more entirely different, isolated paths. Each path becomes a path by receiving insights from other paths. One important aspect of Asian context is religious pluralism and Christian pilgrimage is progressive integration of truth that is revealed to others in one's own experience of the story of Jesus. The meaning of Christ and the Christian gospel has to emerge in the process of an inter-religious communication. Nobody is giving the Christian theologian alone the authority to decide the content of an 'authentic gospel'. People from diverse religio-cultural backgrounds will, in terms of their contexts, decide the content of the gospel. Therefore comes the relevance of Indian philosophy in the construction of an Indian Christian philosophy.

The six valid sources of knowledge (pramāṇas) of Indian epistemology are perception, inference, scripture, comparison, postulation and non-cognition. These can be discovered as pramāṇas in Indian Christian epistemology so that an authentic Indian Christian theological method as well as an understanding of Indian Christian sources of authority may be clarified for the benefit of all the Indian Christian philosophical constructions. Out of the six pramāṇas, if śabda (word, scripture) can be classified under revelation, the other five are classified under reason. But it should be noted that there is an integral relationship between reason and revelation in Indian epistemology and consequently in Indian Christian philosophy. Śabda as revelation in Indian philosophy and subsequently in Indian Christian philosophy transcends any dogmatism and hence is in line with human rationality. Also, all the other five pramāṇas, which constitute the realm of human

rationality, are always illumined by the Innermost Ātman. By establishing śabda as an ultimate source of knowledge, the Indian Christian philosopher upholds the authority of the Bible and extra-Biblical scriptures. A word signifies not a particular (vyakti), but the universal class character (jāti or ākr̥ti) which is eternal. The Indian Christian philosopher whole-heartedly receives not the 'particular' Bible and Jesus but the 'universal' Bible and Jesus. Also the Scriptural interpretation is in terms of the lakṣaṇā method i.e., the secondary meaning, related to the first and brought out by a definite context according to the speaker's or writer's intention, is what is taken into consideration. Perception proclaims the integral relation between humans, Nature and the Innermost Reality, Ātman and makes Christian philosophy rooted in day-to-day experience. Inference challenges us to identify the invariable concomitances (vyāptis) in Christian philosophical issues in terms the present day Indian context. On perceiving Jesus to be like the person pointed out by the Old Testament and the Upaniṣads, we come to know that the Old Testament and the Upaniṣads definitely point to Jesus through comparison. By means of postulation we can arrive at philosophical statements that explain seemingly inexplicable phenomena in Indian Christian philosophy and Non-cognition recommends an apophatic Indian Christian philosophy. The perspective taken by us in such an interpretation involves the use of the understanding of śabda and other pramāṇas as expounded by Indian philosophy in the very articulation of Indian Christian pramāṇas. This therefore becomes different from the approach taken by the Indian Christian theologians such as A. J. Appasamy, R. H. S. Boyd, A. P. Nirmal and Paul Gregorios.

We could note the content of an Indian Christian philosophy in terms of a Metaphysics. Metaphysics is understood here as a theory of reality, reality implying the total range of reals i.e., human person, Nature and what is beyond these, namely God. To these Jesus Christ is added when we think of an Indian Christian philosophy. Of all the Indian philosophical schools, it is Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta that is

found resourceful in providing support for an Indian Christian philosophy. Also, the Indian Christian philosophy thus constructed has affinity with Eastern Christian thought. In Indian Christian philosophy God is unknowable as well as Saccidānanda. God is unknowable in His/Her essence, nature or inner being and knowable in His/Her energies, operations or acts of grace, life and power. This is a basic affirmation of Eastern Christian theology. Advaita Vedānta can contribute much to this line of thought and that can be an important feature of an Indian Christian philosophy. Brahman/Ātman is basically unknowable though some Upaniṣadic statements can provide the essential indication (*svarūpa lakṣaṇā*) of Brahman. Brahman is one in whom there is no distinguishing mark such as name or form or action or heterogeneity or species or quality. The function of words is through one or other of these. Hence Brahman has to be described as 'not this, not this'. Brahman is the subject of everything, the source of the capacity of the organs to act. Whatever is perceived, is perceived through the light of Brahman but Brahman is not perceived through any other light. The knower cannot be known by the knower, just as fire cannot be consumed by the consuming fire. The goal of apophatic Indian Christian philosophy as that of Eastern Christian theology is deification by virtue of the salutary function of the unknowability of God. Unknowability of God leads to union with God. The unknowable Brahman/Ātman is simultaneously conceived as Saccidānanda. Brahman is Sat means He/She exists by Himself/Herself. Cit means self-knowledge, knowing oneself without any external intervention. Brahman is Ānanda i.e., supremely happy in His/her self-colloquy. Brahman is Saccidānanda means that Brahman knows Himself/Herself and from that self-knowledge proceeds His/Her eternal beatitude. God as Saccidānanda is Trinity, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit means God comprehends Himself/Herself by one act of eternal knowledge; the knowing self is the Father; the known self or the self-begotten by His/Her knowledge is the Son; and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of reciprocal love proceeding from the Father and the Son.

Saccidānanda can also signify the mystery of the divine presence in the innermost sanctuary of a human person. In awaking to himself at the center of his being, Jesus awoke to the Father. Because he is pre-eminently the representative 'Son of Man', humanity shares in everything that he does and in all that he achieves. Sin is alienation from our real self; it is to fall into a separate, divided self. Redemption-atonement- is the return to unity; it is awakening to our true being in the Cit. In Jesus the Cit, the sin, which brought a divided consciousness into the world, is overcome and Nature and humans are restored to their original unity with God.

Apart from conceiving Jesus Christ as the representative Cit, Indian Christian philosophy can be rich with a variety of other interpretations. For example the role of īśvara in Vedānta corresponds functionally to the role of Christ in Christian thought. Christ's Incarnation is a case of *vivaṇṭa* i.e., become without change. *Tādātmya* relation denotes the effect's complete dependence upon the Supreme Ātman and hence denotes the relation between creature and creator. It denotes non-reciprocal relation and hence correctly represents the relation in which the *hypostasis* or Person of the Divine *Logos* takes unto Himself/Herself the human nature. It has been pointed out that in raising the question of the foundations of Christian thought, we must raise the question of Ultimate Reality along with the question of Christ. Wrongly, in Christian thought, history is taken to be the 'place' of Christ. But we must place the event of Jesus as Christ in the Ultimate Reality rather than in history or in the world of humans or in the sphere of action, even if action is construed as that of God. We must raise the question of Ultimate Reality in the Vedāntic fashion and at the same time, and within that question itself, ask about the meaning of Jesus Christ. The present author in his writings has shown that the significance of Jesus lies in his denial of any significance for himself through complete self-sacrifice and Advaita Vedānta provides a philosophical basis for this self-sacrifice of Jesus and thus explains his meaning for us: It is Being Himself/Herself who is perceived in a

form other than His/Her own namely Jesus and hence we should not make any assumption of anything other than Being at any time or place. For those who know the real character of the rope and clay, the name and idea of serpent and jar cease and in the same manner for those who know the real character of Being, the name and idea of Jesus cease. Jesus sacrificed himself to discover his reality as Being. We have to sacrifice ourselves as he did to discover our reality as Being. The interpretation of Jesus as the extrinsic denominator (*upādhi*), name and form (*nāma rūpa*), and effect (*kārya*) of Brahman affirms this relation of total dependence on the part of Jesus upon Brahman. The function of Jesus was interpreted as to manifest the all-pervasive, illuminative and unifying power of the Supreme Ātman, as to manifest that the Supreme Brahman as Pure Consciousness is the Witness and Ātman of all and as to manifest the eternally present human liberation. Such an interpretation paves the way to understand the work of Jesus in a novel way, different from what the Atonement theories have tried to present and thus new meanings are emerging regarding the person and work of Christ through Advaita Vedānta.

In Indian Christian philosophy creation can be interpreted as *Māyā*. *Māyā* means that creation is by the power of the will of God. Creation is *Māyā* implies the following insights: (a) God is not necessarily a creator. Creation arises from God's freedom. Creation is the effect of the divine thought. It manifests the perfections of the Infinite and Absolute Being. Creation is the overflow of the abundance of Brahman to manifest and impart His/her own perfections. It is only in the heart of God that the antinomy of created existence can be resolved. The revelation of the Trinity as *Saccidānanda* means that there is no distinction between God and His/Her self-manifestation in the mystery of His/Her inner being. Creation is the 'expansion' of His/Her inner self-manifestation. (b) Creation has no being in itself; what it has is derived being. Creation's being is totally derived from God. All modifications which are name and form are real by the Ātman who is real and left to themselves they are unreal. This basic affirmation also

hints at the Eastern Christian theological understanding of the self-sacrifice of God, the self-emptying of God in Christ involved in the ongoing process of creation. The loving, sacrificial involvement of God manifest in the Incarnation is implicit from the first moment of creation. The paradox of Christ making the whole creation his body by the self-emptying act of dispossessing the lower self sets the paradigm for a Christian approach to creation. The self-sacrifice of Christ affirms Being; and derivatively affirms creation's reality as Being and for this Advaita provides an ideological basis. Further, the Advaita Vedāntic idea that before creation this universe was in Brahman as undifferentiated name and form (*avyākṛta nāma rūpa*) can clarify matters regarding Eastern Christian as well as Indian Christian understanding of creation. The undifferentiated name and form is parallel to the energies of God in creation. In the beginning, i.e., in its previous condition creation had its name and form undifferentiated, not that it did not exist at all. It pre-existed in Brahman as potential seed (*bījaśaktiḥ*).

Advaita Vedānta stands for an integral Brahman-human-Creation relationship and Indian Christian philosophy wholeheartedly receives this insight. Perception for Advaita and Indian Christian philosophy is not only the affirmation of the integral relation that exists between humans and creation, but also the affirmation of the integral relation that exists between the Brahman/Ātman, humans and creation. In line with Advaita, Indian Christian philosophy interprets a human person as a *jīvātman* (individual soul) plus inner senses, outer senses and body conjoined. *Jīvātman* is a reflection (*ābhāsa*) of the Supreme Ātman in the mirror-like ego-sense. The pre-eminence of human person lies in his/her competence for action and knowledge. Only human birth is the means of attaining human goals (*puruṣārthaḥ*). Image of God signifies the reflection of Brahman/Ātman in human personality starting with the intellect and likeness points to the realization of the Brahman/Ātman. Brahman/Ātman is knowable in His/Her energies or operations of pervasion, illumination, and unification. Brahman/

Ātman pervades, illumines and unifies all the levels and layers of human personality effecting deification. This is the view of Eastern Christian theology, Advaita Vedānta and Indian Christian philosophy. The five human sheaths are physical, vital, mental, intelligent and blissful and the Ātman is implanted in each of them as well as innermost to all of them. The deification of humans is in terms of this implantation. Brahman/ Ātman illumines the whole of human person and the total creation. This illumination also can be conceived as effecting deification. As an emerald or any other gem dropped for testing into milk etc. imparts its luster to them so the luminous Ātman unifies and integrates the intellect and all the organs within the body and imparts His/Her luster to them. Advaita enables Indian Christian philosophy to affirm that there is always total dependence on the part of humans upon Brahman/Ātman. Human person who is the name and form of Brahman, is real by Satātman.

Thus it is evident that a journey toward a Christian philosophy is possible through Indian philosophy. An Indian Christian philosophy is in the emergence from within Indian philosophy, especially from within Advaita Vedānta. Both in its method and content it has the promise of creativity is the good news of the day for all those who are willing to receive it.

PART TWO

**SOME RECENT PAPERS**

## VI

# THE ŚABDA-DHVANI METHODS OF BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS

**D***hvani* in *Kāvyaśāstra* is the evocative meaning and *dhvani* method of interpretation in Biblical hermeneutics is suggested by a number of Catholic scholars. This we study in the first section of this chapter. Scripture (*Śruti*) as *Śabda* is a *pramāṇa* in Indian *āstika* schools of philosophy and the rules of understanding and interpretation of the scripture have been worked out in detail under *śabda pramāṇa* by the *Mīmāṃsā*, *Advaita Vedānta* and other schools of philosophy and these can be of great help in Indian Biblical-Theological hermeneutics is the conviction of the present author. The second section is devoted to the discussion of this matter and our concluding observations are given in the third and final section.

### 1. *Dhvani* Method and Biblical Hermeneutics

#### (a) *Dhvani* Method:

The method of interpreting texts developed in traditional Indian aesthetics known as *dhvani*, is a possible way to interpret the Biblical texts. Anandavardhana (9<sup>th</sup> C.E.), a poet and critic from Kashmir proposed this method and gives us a model by interpreting the great epic *Mahabharata*. Though his work *Dhvanyāloka* (The Flash of Evocation) refers to *dhvani* as being inherited from ancient times as

for example from the grammarians, still it is the first work that treats of this topic in detail.<sup>1</sup> *Dhvani* literally means sound, tone, echo, etc, but in aesthetics it means evocation or a poem that evokes. According to Anandavardhana *dhvani* is a specific arrangement of language, wherein the primary meaning remains subordinate in order that the evoked significance shines prominently and clearly.<sup>2</sup> He explains its nature through different metaphors. It is like the charm (*lāvaṇya*) in a young woman, which is more than the sum total of her proportionate limbs. Or it is like a soul (*ātman*) in a body (*śarīra*), the soul of poetry being more than the denotative meanings. Another metaphor used is that of lamp and the pot (*ghataprādīpanyāya*). Once the light reveals the pot in a dark room, the attention is shifted to the discovered pot. If the literal or expressed meaning is the lamp, the evoked meaning is the pot.<sup>3</sup>

*Dhvani* as description of a certain specific arrangement of language, is what is called symbol. The linguistic structure of a *dhvani*-event shows that it is a symbol in the true sense of the word. A symbol is a sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, which points to a reality beyond itself in and through what it connotes. What the symbol stands for cannot be shown in any other way than through symbol.<sup>4</sup> Anand Amaladass' work on Anandavardhana's *Dhvanyaloka* is

An attempt to view *dhvani* (that is, specific arrangement of language wherein the denoted meaning is subordinate in order that the evoked Significance may shine forth prominently) – as the language of symbol. In other words, what we understand by *dhvani* is also what we mean by the symbol-character of reality. That is, the *dhvani* takes us through the denoted meaning to its. Meaningfulness through the external appearance to the core of reality itself. That is how *dhvani* is understood as the language of symbol. Secondly, *dhvani* is also the symbol of language in its wider sense. Here the Language is understood as the total intelligibility of “being”, the self-expression of reality itself. Language is that larger reality in which and through which the language of symbol is possible. Of this reality, which is the *a priori*

condition for every type of understanding *dhvani* is the symbol. Thus *dhvani* as the specific arrangement of language is language of symbol and this very same *dhvani*-event is the symbol of Language, a pointer to the total intelligibility of reality itself.<sup>5</sup>

*Dhvani* is something like an echo or resonance creating newer and newer echoes. The term *dhvani* is used only when the suggested sense (*vyañgya*) is predominant. The argument of Anandvardhana is that categories like *abhidhā* (primary meaning), *lakṣaṇā* (secondary meaning), *anumāna* (inference), *tātparya* (import of a sentence), and various *alaṃkāras* (poetic usages) are not adequate to explain reality. Beyond these categories there is something real and more beautiful, which he calls *dhvani*. The main task of *lakṣaṇā* is to remove the incompatibility implied in *abhidhā*. It has no power to suggest any additional meaning. But *dhvani* provides an additional meaning, which is something new. Gaṅgāyām ghoṣaḥ (the hamlet on the Ganges) has to be understood as the hamlet on the bank of the river Ganges according to *lakṣaṇā* interpretation. But *dhvani* interpretation would further clarify that the hamlet has an atmosphere of peace, prayer and holiness associated with the sacred river.<sup>6</sup>

The theory of *dhvani* as it appears in the history of Kāvyaśāstra in India is a major contribution to the study of significance of language. It accepts the traditional distinction between the primary or literal meaning of a sentence and the sometimes obvious and sometimes not so obvious secondary or implied meaning. But at the same time it goes beyond this distinction to postulate a third but important sphere of 'suggested meaning'. *Dhvani* is that use of language which through either the primary or the secondary meaning or through both of them takes the reader to a depth-meaning which is experienceable but not expressible.<sup>7</sup> The significance that is revealed through *dhvani* is really a part of that Ultimate which makes any and every object of abiding value. When such significance is experienced what happens is that the reader is transported from the realm of objects to the realm of Subject.<sup>8</sup> About the nature of *dhvani* it is stated thus :

It comes to life in the process of being relished. For this there is no explanation other than the operation of suggestion. It is not the object of denotative language and so it cannot be circumscribed by words. *Nasākṣāt śabda-vyāpāra-viśayaḥ*, as Anandavardhana puts it. But it does not mean that it is beyond the scope of words and that it cannot be communicated at all. It could be communicated but indirectly, evocatively, through pointer language symbols. *Dhvani* operates through signs which are linguistic or non-linguistic, through words, gestures, musical sounds and so on.<sup>9</sup>

While the expressed meaning (*abhidhā* or *lakṣaṇā*) brings a cognitive perception pure and simple, the *dhvani* meaning creates an atmosphere of pleasant surprise (*camatkṛti*), at least in the hearts of refined people (*vidagdha*) as they experience the thrill of a discovery. Also, while the expressed meaning is the same for all as it is something fixed in a context, the *dhvani* meaning can vary for people depending on each one's background. For example the phrase *gato stamarkaḥ* (the sun has set) can mean different things to different people according to circumstances : for a lover it denotes time for a rendezvous, for a soldier time to attack the enemy and for a religious person time to begin the evening worship.<sup>10</sup>

As per the nature of *dhvani* it is divided into three kinds namely *vastudhvani*, *alamkāradhvani* and *rasadhvani*. In *vastudhvani* what is evoked can be of the nature of an objective fact, an event or anything that could be said in words. In *alamkāradhvani* the figure of speech is evoked by the power of the words and their meanings. Both these can also be expressed and therefore are extrinsic *dhvani*. But *rasadhvani* is intrinsic i.e., can never be expressed but only evoked and therefore can be considered as *dhvani* proper. The nature of *rasadhvani* is such that it is not the object of denotative language but it could be evocatively pointed to, hinted at. It comes closer to the notion of symbol that points beyond itself in and through what it denoted.<sup>11</sup> Rasa results from the combinations of the dominant emotional mood with the objects of emotion such as the hero and

heroin and exciting causes such as the spring flowers, moonlight and the bower (*vibhva*), the external manifestations of emotion such as the movement of the eyebrows, glances and smile (*anubhāva*) and the accessory moods which come and go helping in the manifestation of the *rasa* (*vybhicāribhāva*). *Rasadhvani* comes into play between the evocative language of the poet and the aesthetic sensibility of the reader.<sup>12</sup>

*Rasadhvani* is the *dhvani* proper, the intrinsic *dhvani*. *Rasa* is a result of a dialogue between the reality out side and the actively responding experiencer.<sup>13</sup> Ananda Amaladass notes :

What Ananda understands by *rasa* is a reality that can be experienced and so can be located though it is not possible to bring it under the denotation of language. The nature of this reality is such that though it belongs to the appreciative level, it can be reached through perceptive reality. In other words, it is a non-space-time dimension of a space-time reality.<sup>14</sup>

The *dhvani*-event enable a communion, a communing of the inner essence of human person with that of the World and that is what *rasa-experience* is. A coming in touch with the essence of things is accomplished here. *Dhvani language* takes us to that realm of Significance, which is *rasa*. Therefore the ontic status of *rasa* is evident.<sup>15</sup>

Significance is communicated at the level of the Subject (*puruṣa*, *ātman*). It is communing with the *ātman* and the experience of communing is *rasa*. Significance is what happens to a person when he/she is struck by an idea, an insight into the nature of things, an act or the appearance of a person. It is an experience of a person that calls for total transformation. It is an awareness. The experiencing person knows, and knows that he/she knows even though he/she does not know how and what exactly. The person is unable to express or articulate the experienced awareness, but only can share with those who have similar experience.<sup>16</sup>

By presenting to us a *dhvani*-reading of the *Mahābhārata*, Anandavardhana provides us with a paradigm how one could interpret the text according to *dhvani* theory.<sup>17</sup> According to him the whole text of the Epic evokes *śāntarasa* (aesthetic experience of peace) and *mokṣa* (final liberation) as the human goal in life. This is not explicitly stated but evocatively hinted at. Anandavardhana treats the whole epic narrative as *kāvya* (literary work) and *śāstra* (scripture) in one. Seen the Epic as *kāvya*, aesthetic experience of peace becomes the focus and if the text is considered as *śāstra*, liberation as ultimate human goal is the focus. Depending on a person's angle of perception, the text will evoke different kinds of significance. Anandavardhana does a sort of form criticism identifying the literary form of the Mahabharata.<sup>18</sup>

The key evoker in the Mahabharata text according to Anandavardhana is the expression "herein the eternal Lord Vāsudeva is glorified". The implications of this key evoker is that the Lord alone is the abiding supreme Reality and everything else, fame, valour, kingdom, power etc, is a passing phenomenon. The whole narrative is meant to elicit a liberative process (*mokṣa*) in the reader in order that he/she might view the ultimate Reality (*parabrahman*) as his/her goal in life. After identifying the main evoker and the significance it evokes Anandavardhana brings in his exegetical skills to establish this point. He establishes his discovery by seeking textual evidence and interpreting it with all the tools of literary criticism. An analysis of the key words and parallel passages both in the *Mahābhārata* and other texts in the same tradition is undertaken. An attempt is made to support his arguments from the earlier history of the interpreters and other texts are cited to show how his interpretation is valid.<sup>19</sup>

*Vyaṅgya* is what is being evoked. It is not a third meaning after *abhidhā* and *lakṣaṇā*. *Vyaṅgya* is what is evoked through the potency of the *vācya*. It is not merely an intellectual idea. But it is an emotionally experienced content, a poetic mood, a situational and social atmosphere

in which it is produced. *Vyaṅgya* refers to all these. The nature of *vyaṅgya* being *alaukika*, that is, on a different level altogether, it is not noticed easily by all in a *kāvya* and what is seen outwardly is mistakenly considered to be the whole.<sup>20</sup> Anand Amaladass says:

Dhvani is not a meaning among other meanings. It is rather meaningfulness or Significance attained through a meaning. Meaning and Significance are on different levels... Hence they cannot be identified nor even put on the same level. *Dhvani* is not merely an indirect way of conveying a meaning for the sake of charm... Dhvani proper is not a rational process where meaning and its implications are arrived at in the logical order. Dhvani is the Significance that a meaning brings about to person in the context of a deeper experience. This Significance does not happen in the abstract but is achieved in and through *vācyārtha*.<sup>21</sup>

(b) *Biblical Hermeneutics in terms of Dhvani Method.*

George M. Soares Prabhu has pointed out that in interpreting the parables of Jesus as metaphor, rhetorical criticism is relying on *dhvani*. Rhetorical criticism treats the parables as autonomous aesthetic objects. A metaphor is an expression comparing one thing with another in which the element of comparison is omitted. Like *dhvani* a metaphor does not communicate a lesson, but evokes an experience of the transcendent, which is utterly beyond conceptualization. The evocation occurs only when the sensitivity of the reader is attuned to and resonates with the symbolic language of the metaphor.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps the whole New Testament can be treated metaphorically since it is the story of Jesus who is par excellence the metaphor of God and therefore *dhvani* interpretation of non-parabolic New Testament texts also is a possibility. For example Soares Prabhu provides a *dhvani* interpretation of the stilling of the Storm of Mark 4.35-41, going beyond a historical critical analysis. It is the experience of ultimate stability behind the turmoil of our agitated and threatened existence that the story of the stilling of the storm evokes.<sup>23</sup>

M. Vellanickal has provided a *dhvani* interpretation of the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman (John 4.2-26), without asking about the historical plausibility of the scene and the radical critical question about the formation of this dialogue.<sup>24</sup> What we notice in the passage is an invitation to enter into a process of divine-human encounter. The initiative is taken by God who meets us in ordinary circumstances of life, in the midst of our existential problems. The human prejudices are often a hindrance to recognise God confronting us.<sup>25</sup> Further it is noted as the outcome of the study that

Only a recognition of our basic thirst for God and an awareness of our unrest resulting from going after one supposed satisfaction to another, will lead us to God, the authentic source of the living water that will quench our thirst for ever. Only passing through the painful process of self-discovery and self-exposure to the penetrating and purifying revelatory light and power of God we can reach the full recognition of God confronting us and be enriched by the living water that will quench for ever our thirst for life.<sup>26</sup>

Anand Amaladass has given us a *dhvani* reading of John 21.1-19. According to him the invitation to have breakfast is a key-evoker in the passage. Here silence evokes a process of deeper communication without words. Jesus here plays the role of a loving and sensitive host. We find in him a genuine concern for others, accepting them as they are with all their failures and still enthusiastically approaching them in their hour of need. This instills confidence in the disciples.<sup>27</sup> Also, Jesus as host gives a mission to the disciples. It is a mission to be hosts to others in their turn, to express the type of love and concern they had experienced. Only when one has experienced the love of the Lord, can that person give it to others. Come and have breakfast is the invitation to share Jesus' love. Once we experience this love, there is the inner urge to express it. That is how the Christian vocation to follow the Lord and to share his mission is presented in the passage.<sup>28</sup>

Francis X.D'sa is of the view that the New Testament abounds in the use of *dhvani*. As an example he interprets Mt.6.25-33 from the

Sermon on the Mount. Though what is explicitly stated is that we should not be anxious about the things of this life, since our heavenly Father will provide all these things, what is projected through *dhvani* is the care with which the heavenly Father goes about fulfilling His work of being a Father. By being shown His care and concern for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, we are led to discover His absolute and unconditional care for us. We are also led to discover our new relationship to Him. Given such a care on His part for us, we should discover and develop a new attitude towards Him, one of trust and confidence; an attitude of a child towards his/her father.<sup>29</sup>

From all these examples of New Testament interpretation we can note that *dhvani* way of interpreting a text draws special attention to the evocative process that is at work through all the factors of language phenomenon. It emphasizes the special role of the sensitive reader (*sahṛdaya*) whose cultural background, personal maturity and aesthetic sensibility enable him/her to gain newer insights into textual context where the dialogue between the religious and literary text and the sensitive reader takes place. The *dhvani* way of interpretation presupposes *pratibhā*-inborn imaginative genius and *vyutpatti* – a cultivated and discerning judgement in using that gift. If literary criticism may enable us to know about a text, *dhvani* way of interpretation enables us to understand the text. If literary criticism remains at the level of meaning *dhvani* elevates us to the realm of significance or meaningfulness.<sup>30</sup>

## 2. Verbal Testimony (Śabda) as an Indian Christian Pramāṇa for Biblical – Theological Hermeneutics.

The Mīmāṃsā interpretation of śabda (verbal testimony or scripture) is accepted by Advaita Vedāntins as well. Śabda is one of the sources of valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*) in Indian epistemology, the other five being perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference (*anumāna*), comparison (*upamāna*), postulation (*arthāpatti*) and non-cognition (*anupalabdhi*). These six *pramāṇas* provide us with sources of

authority, guide us in our knowing process or hermeneutics and provide us with diverse aspects of an authentic theological method, i.e., the procedure followed in acquiring, analysing and synthesizing the data relevant to the subject theology. It is epistemology (theory of knowledge) that leads us to metaphysics (theory of reality i.e., theory of human person, universe and God) or theology. Of the six *pramāṇas*, śabda focuses on scriptural hermeneutics and so it becomes our special subject of interest when we think of Biblical hermeneutics.<sup>31</sup>

Indian Christian theology takes serious note of the following Indian epistemological stand point : The testimony of the Śruti is superhuman (apauruṣeya) and therefore eternal, infallible. The eternal Veda is seen at the beginning of each *kalpa* by the ṛṣis. The authority of the Vedas is direct and independent as they generate knowledge of the true nature of Brahman, which can never be nullified, by a higher knowledge. The Vedas are eternal not in any dogmatic sense,<sup>32</sup> but because the words of which they are composed are eternal. A word signifies not a particular (*vyakti*), but the universal class character (*jāti* or *ākṛti*) which is eternal.<sup>33</sup>

Regarding the question of the ‘meaning’ of words we see that some important logical problems were raised in Indian philosophy in this regard. An important problem discussed by almost every school is : ‘Does a word primarily mean a particular (*vyakti*) or a universal (*jāti*)? Five different theories came to be held as answers to this question. They are : the word means (a) a particular (Sāṅkhas) ; (b) as universal as the mere generic form (*ākṛti*) (the Jainas) ; (c) a universal as the essential generic character (*jāti*) (the Advaitins, the Mīmāṃsakas and the early grammarians); (d) all these three (the Naiyāyikas of the old school, Gautam and Vātsyāyana); and lastly (e) the universalized particular (the renowned Naiyāyikas, Jagadīśa and Viśvanātha).

According to the Sāṅkhyas a word signifies a particular (*vyakti*) only. An attribute can be predicated of an object only, not of a class

and besides, there are words which are singular or proper such as 'Sun', 'Moon', 'Ganges' etc. In the opinion of the Jainas and some others a word denotes primarily the *ākṛti*. By this term they mean the universal shape or outward form. It is the knowledge of this form, which leads necessarily to the knowledge of the individuals in which it is particularized. According to the Advaitins, Mīmāṃsakas and the old Grammarians, a word denotes not only the *ākṛti* in the Jaina sense, but the *jāti* i.e., the universal class character or all the universal essential attributes of the particular.

*Jāti* means all the common essential characteristics actually existing in a group of individuals. In the view of the old Naiyāyikas, a word means all the three namely *vyakti*, *ākṛti* and *jāti*; as per the emphasis, the primary denotation of a word refers to one or other of these three. According to some Neo-Naiyāyikas, a word primarily means a particular characterized by a universal. The Advaitians are of the conviction that it is the universal alone (Kumārila Bhaṭṭa and Śāṅkara use the term *ākṛti* with the meaning of *jāti*; later Vedāntins use only the term *jāti*)<sup>34</sup> which is primarily signified by a word, not the universalised particular, because the latter is already implied in the former; the knowledge of the qualified (*Viśiṣṭa*) i.e. the individual as such presupposes the knowledge of the qualification (*Viśeṣaṇa*) i.e., the universal. The knowledge of the particular is subsumed under the knowledge of the universal and the latter is known in the same knowledge that reveals the particular. It is by implication (*lakṣaṇā*) and thus indirectly that the individuals are known; what is logically presupposed in the use of a word is the knowledge of the universal alone, and it is sufficient for its valid application. According to Śāṅkara the eternity of *śabda* (word) is nothing but the eternity of the connection of the word with the *ākṛti*.

*Ākṛtis* are not same as *sphoṭas*. A *sphoṭa* is an eternal word and objectified meaning, but an *ākṛti* is an *artha*, an object signified directly by the word. *Ākṛtis* are eternal not because they exist as independent

entities like the *sphoṭas*, but as dependent upon the omniscient knowledge of Brahman of whom we can anthropomorphically conceived them as being the permanent objects. The Śruti in its essential reality is identical with the absolute consciousness, and when it is 'seen' or 'found', it is identical with this pure consciousness as reflected in the *upādhi* or extrinsic denominator of *manas*.<sup>34</sup> Regarding the meaning of words it is *lakṣyārtha* i.e., the secondary meaning related to the first and brought out by a definite context according to the speaker's or writer intention which has to be taken into consideration.<sup>35</sup>

In Indian logic words can have at least three types of meanings (a) the *mukhya* or express meaning which a word has independently to any context; (b) *lakṣyārtha*, which is a secondary meaning, related to the first and brought out by a definite context according to the speaker's or writer's intention; and (c) *Vyañgārtha* or suggestive meaning cherished by poets but cannot serve the purpose of scientific thought.

There are three types of *lakṣyārthas* or secondary meanings: (i) *Jahad-ajahallakṣaṇā*, in which case a part of the original meaning is rejected (e.g., 'my cloth is burned' for 'a part of my cloth is burned') : (ii) *Ajahallakṣaṇā*, in which case the original meaning is fully preserved and the difference that occurs from it is only accidental (eg., 'the red runs' for 'the red horse runs'); (iii) *Jahal-lakṣaṇā* in which case the express meaning is excluded and only an extrinsic relation to it is kept (eg., *dvirepha* -double 'r' comes to mean 'bee' (*bhramara*), because *bhramara* contains twice the letter 'r'). The Indian rhetoricians distinguish secondary meanings into those that have been fixed by usage (*rūdhilakṣaṇā*) and those that are occasionally and purposively conferred (*prayojanamulālakṣaṇā*).

In the matter of the meaning of a sentence we have to take note of *abhitānvaya-vāda* which points to the knowledge of the meaning of a sentence as a new kind of meaning as compared to the meaning

of words.<sup>36</sup> For this new kind of knowledge which is called *śābda-bodha*, the conditions to be fulfilled are *ākāṃkṣa* or feeling of incompleteness by each word, *yogyata* or capacity to satisfy another word's want, *āsatti* or proximity between two words and *tātparyya-jñāna* or the knowledge of what is intended.<sup>37</sup> The validity of verbal knowledge is constituted by and also known through the intrinsic conditions of verbal knowledge itself and this stand point is called *prāmāṇya-svatastva-vāda*.<sup>38</sup> The Vedas teach the Ultimate Reality and through out the *jñānakāṇḍa* the purpose is to remove ignorance. The Vedānta-statement are of primary importance in this context.<sup>39</sup> All these insights can be profitably used in the articulation of an Indian Christian understanding of scripture.

In Indian Christian theology *śabda* is a sound used as a symbol for the expression of some meaning and hence stands for a 'word'; it means word or words as the source of knowledge and then corresponds to 'authority' or 'testimony'. By establishing *śabda* as an ultimate source of knowledge, Indian Christian theologian upholds the authority of the Bible and extra-Biblical scriptures.<sup>40</sup>

The authoritativeness of the Vedas lies in its generation of knowledge of Reality, which no other source can give. The authoritativeness of the Bible also has to be appropriated in the realm of its generation of a knowledge of Reality which other sources are unable to give. A *vākya* or sentence is a source of knowledge about facts and consequently Bible as *vākyas* is regarded as a *pramāṇa*. A biblical *vākya* whose import is not contradicted in any other way is a valid source of knowledge.<sup>41</sup>

But we have to elevate the Bible from a double anthropomorphism i.e., conceiving it either as pronounced by an anthropomorphic Lord or as written by anthropos through the inspiration of the anthropomorphic Lord. We have to elevate it to the level of the absolute, eternal. Indian Philosophy provides new insights into the relation between the Bible and Brahman. For the Advaitins, Mīmāṃsakas

and the early grammarians, 'word' always denotes not a particular (*vyakti*), but the universal class character (*jāti or ākṛti*) which is eternal and according to Śaṅkara, in its essential reality it is identical with the absolute consciousness. When the words are particularised they are identical with this pure consciousness as reflected in the *upādhi* (extrinsic denominator) of *manas* (mind), i.e., they become the names-and-forms which are the meaning-contents of words. The words of the Bible denote not the 'particular' but the 'universal' and in essential reality this 'universal' is identical with Brahman. But as written words, they are identical with Brahman as reflected in the extrinsic denominator of mind.<sup>42</sup> An important principle of modern Western hermeneutics, that any hermeneut must set aside three common myths, namely the 'mind of the author', the 'original reader' and the 'original meaning' <sup>43</sup> was well taken in Indian Philosophy even centuries ago in its quest to transcend the 'particular' for the 'universal'.

Indian Philosophy guides Indian biblical and theological hermeneutics not to be very much worried about establishing accurately the original meaning that the author of the text might have intended, as that effort is futile as well as unnecessary. Our aim is not the dogmatic 'particular' but the eternal 'universal'. The 'universal' is the emergent meaning and significance actualized as a result of the fusion together of the 'horizon' of the interpreter and that of the text. The Indian Christian whole-heartedly receives not the 'particular' Bible, but the 'universal' Bible. The Indian Christian theologian whole-heartedly receives not the 'particular Jesus' but the 'universal Jesus'. The 'universal Jesus' is identical with Ultimate Reality, Brahman; but the 'particular Jesus, is a mere reflection of Brahman in the extrinsic denominator of the mind of first century Palestine. The 'particular' of the text is a human word and therefore conditioned by the cultural circumstances in which it was written. In the biblical context even according to a person like Karl Barth,<sup>44</sup> it is not the text that is the Word of God for the text itself is already an interpretation of the Word

of God. We have to live with the text until it disappears and the divine Word itself confronts the interpreter. Thus we have to elevate the Bible from the historical to the eternal. We have to elevate the Bible from the *pauruṣeya* (human) level to *apauruṣeya* (super-human) level; from dogmatism to universality. At the level of the universal there will not be any conflict between the Truth-claims of the different scriptures.

The Indian understanding of word and meaning can enlighten us in the understanding and interpretation of the Bible. The standpoint of the Mīmāṃsakas and Advaitins that the validity of verbal knowledge is constituted by and known from the intrinsic conditions of knowledge itself can help us to affirm that the validity of biblical knowledge is constituted by and known from the intrinsic conditions of that knowledge itself. The Bible, which is *śabda*, is a *pramāṇa*, i.e., an independent source of valid knowledge. Truth is an intrinsic character of knowledge, sooner or later knowledge itself will vouch for its own truth. The Bible is valid in so far as it is true and the truth of the Bible is known from the Bible itself. Non-contradiction is the guarantee for a judgment of validity. External verification removes only doubts and cannot establish the validity of the Bible. Hence the role and importance of Tradition is only very little.<sup>45</sup>

This is not to claim that there is a single 'objective' meaning for the Bible. In the case of *śabda-pramāṇa* no claim of scientific objectivity is made by Indian Philosophy. Scripture cannot define Brahman, it can only indicate Him/Her. The Bible indicates Brahman or Ultimate Reality. This is also not to deny the fact proclaimed by some modern Western hermeneuts that "all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice".<sup>46</sup> The suggestion Indian makes to hermeneutics on this point is that our prejudice, if it is legitimate, will have truth as its intrinsic character.

Again, *śabda* as a *pramāṇa* provides a criterion for evaluating scriptures. Self-validity as mentioned above is this criterion.<sup>47</sup> No

exclusive claim is made that the scripture of a particular religion only is valid. The Vedas or Quran may be as valid as the Bible.

On the question 'what is the object of the Bible', the Mīmāṃsakas and the Advaitins may be able to give us some guidance. The *karmakāṇḍa* and *jñānakāṇḍa* of the Vedas are in one-sense parallels of the Old Testament and the New Testament of the Bible. It may be said that the former in each is more concerned about the law and ritual duties and the latter in each about Ultimate Reality or Truth. What the Advaitins proclaim about the *jñānakāṇḍa*, we may also proclaim as the purpose of the New Testament; to remove ignorance and reveal by indication the true nature of Brahman. And with Śaṅkara we may say that those passages in the New Testament which indicate the true nature of Brahman are the primary texts and all others are only secondary. These primary texts may be called 'gospel-statements' and they are the parallels of the Vedānta- statements.<sup>48</sup>

In the exegesis of Biblical texts, the *Jahad-ajahallakṣaṇā* method employed by Indian logic for understanding the meaning can be used profitably. Take for example, the analogy 'the vine and the branches' used in the Gospel according to St. John.<sup>49</sup> The inner meaning of this analogy may be summarized as follows: (a) There is a very intimate relationship between Jesus, the vine and whole humanity, the branches; the vine is abiding in the branches; and the branches are abiding in the vine. (b) Our abiding in Jesus has direct connection with out bearing fruit. The figure of the vine and the branches presupposes that human life is essentially one of creativity, one of bearing fruit. (c) It is Jesus' life, which is the source of our good works. The self-sacrifice of Jesus is the inspiration for our life and work centered on love and self-sacrifice. Similarly the analogy that we are the body of Christ and individually members of it<sup>50</sup>, can be analyzed through the lakṣaṇā method. Śrutārthāpatti together with lakṣaṇā method constitutes the Indian Christian exegetical method.<sup>51</sup>

The subject (*uddeśya*) and predicate (*vidheya*) relationship in a sentence as identified by Indian logic can again enlighten us to understand the construction of Biblical sentences. Also, the meaning of a sentence or sentences denote something new as compared with the words of these sentences. It is *abhihitānvayavāda*, which is more acceptable with regard to the meaning of the Biblical passages. *Śābdabodha* is a new grade of knowledge, which emerges through the combination of the universals denoted by the different words of the biblical verses. We have to analyse and identify whether the words of the verses of the Bible are having *ākāṃṣa* or feeling of incompleteness, *yogyata* or compatibility on the part of its fellow to satisfy its want, and *āsatti* or proximity between two words presented for combination. If these conditions are not fulfilled then the new grade of meaning that is to emerge from a verse will not happen. Ascertaining the knowledge of what is intended, what is relevant (*tātparyajñāna*) is perhaps very important in arriving at *śābdabodha* of the Bible.<sup>52</sup>

The signs for ascertaining what is intended by a passage (*tātparyanirṇaya*) namely introduction, conclusion, repetition, originally, result, eulogy, and demonstration can be profitably used in understanding biblical passages. These can be aids for the Indian Form Criticism.<sup>53</sup> The Gospels are composed of many smaller periscopes that circulated as separate units in early Christian communities before the Gospels were written. Indian 'Form Criticism or *tātparya-jñāna* is concerned with the forms or patterns of these stories and sayings, and the reasons for their preservation in the Gospels. Paradigms, miracle stories, exhortations, myths, passion story etc. may be further enlightened through the signs of *tātparyanirṇaya*.

### 3. Evaluation and Conclusion

At the outset we may note that the *dhvani* method of understanding and interpretation developed in Indian aesthetics is taken up by Roman Catholic Scholars such as Anand Amaladoss. Francis X.D'Sa, George M. Soares Prabhu and M.Vellanickal to understand

and interpret the Bible. But it should be noted that in the Indian tradition *dhvani* method is used in the understanding and interpretation of poetry and Smṛti texts like Mahābhārata only and not the scripture proper i.e., the Śruti or the Vedic portions of Samhitas, Brahmanas and Upaniṣads. The Śruti is understood and interpreted in India in terms of the Śabda method. Strange indeed, then, to note that none of the Roman Catholic scholars have discussed this Śabda method of understanding and interpretation connecting it to Biblical hermeneutics. True, Francis X.D'Sa has discussed in detail the Mīmāṃsā interpretation of Śabda; but surprisingly he has not said a word connecting it to Biblical hermeneutics.<sup>54</sup> Rather for Biblical hermeneutics, he opts for Dhvani method as we noted above. In such a context the present author's endeavours to bring out the significance of Śabda method of understanding and interpretation in Biblical-theological hermeneutics stands out as though feeble, a single-handed effort.<sup>55</sup>

In Śabda method of interpretation and its use in Indian Biblical-theological hermeneutic the present author could identify the following insights: In Indian Christian theology which follows the footsteps of Indian Philosophy *Śabda* is a sound used as a symbol for the expression of some meaning and hence stands for a 'word'; it means word or words as the source of knowledge and then corresponds to 'authority' or 'testimony'. By establishing *Śabda* as an ultimate source of knowledge, the Indian Christian theologian upholds the authority of the Bible and extra-Biblical Scriptures. Scriptures are superhuman (*apauruṣeya*) and eternal not in any dogmatic sense but because the words of which they are composed are eternal. A word signifies not a particular (*vyakti*), but the universal class character (*jāti* or *ākṛti*) which is eternal; the scriptures in their essential reality is identical with the absolute consciousness, and when they are 'seen' or 'found', they are identical with this pure consciousness as reflected in the *upādhi* (extrinsic denominator) of *manas* (mind). The Indian Christian whole-heartedly receives not the 'particular' Bible, but the 'universal'

Bible. The Indian Christian theologian whole-heartedly receives not the 'particular Jesus' but the 'universal Jesus'. The 'universal Jesus' is identical with God the Absolute, but the 'particular Jesus' is a mere reflection of God the Absolute in the extrinsic denominator of the mind of first century Palestine. The understanding of Śabda as a source of valid knowledge thus elevate Bible as well as other scriptures from the historical to the eternal, from human (*pauruṣeya*) level to the super-human (*apuruṣeya*) level, from dogmatism to universality and at that level there is no conflict of Truth claims. Further, *prāmāṇya-svatastvāyada* which is the standpoint that the validity of verbal knowledge is constituted by and also known through the intrinsic conditions of verbal knowledge itself, clarifies to us the self-validity of the Bible and other Scriptures.

In the matters of Biblical hermeneutics and exegesis it is *lakṣyārtha* i.e., the secondary meaning, related to the first and brought out by a definite context according to the speaker's or writer's intention which has to be taken into consideration. If the Vedanta-statements are interpreted through this *lakṣaṇā* method, the gospel-statements also can be interpreted similarly. Regarding the meaning of a sentence we have to take note of *abhitānvaya-vāda* which points to the knowledge of the meaning of a sentence as a new kind of meaning as compared to the meaning of words. For this new kind of knowledge, which is called *śābda-bodha*, the conditions to be fulfilled are *ākāṅkṣa* or feeling of incompleteness by each word, *yogyata* or capacity to satisfy another word's want, *āsatti* or proximity between two words and *tātparyajñāna* or the knowledge of what is intended. The signs for ascertaining what is intended by a passage are introduction (*upakrama*), conclusion (*upasaṁhāra*), repetition (*abhyāsa*), originality (*apuvata*), result (*bhala*), eulogy (*arthavāda*) and demonstration (*upapatti*) and these are profitable aids for Indian Form Criticism. Also, the subject (*uddeśya*) and predicate (*vidheya*) relationship in a sentence as identified by Indian logic can enlighten us to understand the construction of Bible sentences. The classification

of the Biblical portions into those concerned with ritualism (*karmakāṇḍa*) and those concerned with the realisation of the Supreme Reality (*jñānakāṇḍa*) is again a possibility which Indian hermeneutics offers us.

Where we think of *dhvani* method of understanding and interpretation upheld by Catholic Scholars, we should note that *dhvani* in aesthetics means evocation. In *dhvani* the evoked significance shines forth prominently compared to the primary meaning. It is the language of symbol. It is the notion of symbol that points beyond itself in and through what it denotes. The term *dhvani* is used only when the suggested sense (*vyangya*) is predominant. *Dhvani* provides an additional meaning which is something new. *Dhvani* in *Kāvyaśāstra* takes the reader to a depth meaning, which is experienceable but not expressible. The meaning here is communicated indirectly evocatively, through pointer language, symbols. The *dhvani* meaning creates an atmosphere of pleasant surprise (*camatkṛti*), at least in the hearts of refined people (*vidagdha*) as they experience the thrill of a discovery. It can vary for people depending on each one's background. *Rasadhvani*, the intrinsic *dhvani*, is the *dhvani* proper. It is a non-space-time dimension of a space-time reality. Significance is communicated at the level of the Subject (*Puruṣa*, *ātman*). It is communing with the *ātman* and the experience of communing is *rasa*. *Dhvani* therefore is meaningfulness or Significance attained through a meaning, *Anandavardhana* (9<sup>th</sup> c. CE) proposed this method and he has given us a practical demonstration of it by interpreting the great epic *Mahābhārata*, in his work *Dhvanyaloka*. In his view the key evoker in the *Mahābhārata* text is the expression “herein the eternal Lord Vasudeva is glorified” and the whole text of the Epic evokes *śāntarasa* (aesthetic experience of peace) and *mokṣa* (final liberation) as the human goal in life.

George M. Soares Prabhu has shown that like *dhvani* a metaphor evokes as experience of the transcendent and therefore in interpreting

the parables of Jesus as metaphor, rhetorical criticism is relying on *dhvani*. As Jesus is the metaphor of God, the whole New Testament can be treated metaphorically. For example the stilling on the Storm (Mt.4.35-42) suggests the experience of ultimate stability behind the turmoil of life. The *dhvani* interpretation of the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman (Jn.4.4-26) according to M.Vellanickal suggests an invitation to enter into a process of divine-human encounter, for which God takes the initiative destroying human prejudices. For Anand Amaladass in the passage John 21.1-19, the invitation to have breakfast is the key-evoker and the experience we gain is about Jesus' genuine concern for us, accepting us as we are with all our failures; and also about the need for us to follow his example. In the *dhvani* interpretation of Mt.6.25-33, Francis X.D'Sa brings out the care and concern of the heavenly Father for us and this inspires us to develop a new attitude of trust and confidence towards him. Thus from all these examples we can learn that if literary criticism remains at the level of meaning, *dhvani* elevates us to the realm of significance or meaningfulness.

Though *Śabda* method of hermeneutics is ideal for Indian Christians as it keeps the continuity of understanding and interpretation of the scripture started in India by the Mīmāṃsakas and continued by the Vedantins, there is no harm in adding to it the insights of the *dhvani* method of interpretation of the *kāvyaśāstra*. In fact the *dhvani* method can only enrich the *śabda* method of Biblical-theological hermeneutics in India.

### Notes

1. Cf. Anand Amaladass, *Philosophical Implications of Dhvani. Experience of Symbol Language in Indian Aesthetics*, Vienna, Austria : De Nobili Research Library, 1984; K.Krishnamoorthy, *Anandavardhana's Dhvanyaloka*, Dharwar: Karnatak University, 1974.
2. Anand Amaladass, "Dhvani Method of Interpretation and Biblical Hermeneutics", *Indian Theological Studies*, Vol.31, No.3, September 1994, p.201.
3. *Ibid.*, p.202.

4. Anand\_Amaladass, *Philosophical Implications of Dhvani, Experience of Symbol Language in Indian Aesthetics*, *op.cit.*, pp.139-145; 162-172.
5. *Ibid.*, p.10.
6. Anand\_Amaladass, "Dhvani Theory in Sanskrit Poetics", *Biblebhashyam*, Vol.V.,No.4, December 1979, pp.261-62.
7. Francis X.D'Sa. "Dhvani as a method of Interpretation" *Biblebhashyam*, Vol. V, No.4, December 1979, pp.276, 279.
8. *Ibid.*, p.293.
9. Anand Amaladass, "Poetic Quest for Truth and *Dhvani* mode of Communication", in *Christian Contribution to Indian Philosophy*, ed. By Anand Amaladass, Madras: CLS, 1995, pp.9-10.
10. Anand Amaladass "Dhvani Theory in Sanskrit Poetics", *op.cit.*, pp.264-65.
11. Anand Amaladass, "Dhvani method of interpretation and Biblical Hermeneutics" *op.cit.*, 202-203.
12. Anand Amaladass, "Dhvani Theory in Sanskrit Poetic", *op.cit.*, pp.266-72.
13. Anand Amaladass, *Philosophical Implications of Dhvani Experience of Symbol Language in Indian Aesthetics*, *op.cit.*, pp.90-121.
14. *Ibid.*, p.121.
15. *Ibid.*, p.154.
16. *Ibid.*, pp.154-55.
17. Cf. Anand Amaladass, "Dhvani Theory and the Scriptural Interpretation-Dhvani Reading of the Mahabharata by Anandavardhana" *Adyar Library Bulletin*, Vol.54, 1990, pp.68-98.
18. Anand Amaladass, "Dhvani method of Interpretation and Biblical Hermeneutics" *op.cit.*, pp.209-210.
19. *Ibid.*, p.210; Anand Amaladass, "Dhvani Theory in Sanskrit Poetics", *op.cit.*, pp.273-74.
20. Anand\_Amaladass, *Philosophical Implications of Dhvani. Experience of Symbol Language in Indian Aesthetics*, *op.cit.*, pp.84-89
21. *Ibid.*, p.207.
22. Cf. George M. Soares Prabhu, *The Dharma of Jesus*, ed. by Francis Xavier D'Sa. Maryknoll NY : Orbis Book, 2003; "And there was a great calm. A Dhvani Reading of the Storm", *Biblebhashyam*, Vol. V, No. 4, December 1979, pp.295-301.
23. *Ibid.*, pp.302-308,cf. Also George Soares-Prabhu, "The Historical Critical Method. Reflections on its Relevance for the Study of the Gospels in India Today" in *Theologizing in India*, ed. by M. Amaladoss et al, Bangalore : TPI, 1981, pp.314-67.
24. M. Vellanickal, "Drink from the source of the Living Water", *Biblebhashyam*, Vol. V, No.4, December 1979, pp.309-18.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*, p.318.
27. Anand Amaladass, "Dhvani method of interpretation and Biblical Hermeneutics" *op.cit.*, pp.212-14.
28. *Ibid.*, pp.215-16
29. Francis X.D'Sa, "Dhvani as a Method of Interpretation" *op.cit.*, pp.285-89.

30. Anand Amaladass, "Dhvani Method of interpretation and Biblical Hermeneutics". *op.cit.*, 216-17. Here it should be noted that George Gispert-Sauch's suggestion of a vyañjana method of Interpretation boils down to *Dhvani* method only cf. George Gispert-Sauch, "Biblical Inspiration as "Parama Vyañjana" in *Research Seminar on Non-Biblical Scriptures*, Bangalore : NBCLC, 1974, pp.136-52.
31. For a study of Śabda and other pramāṇas and their creative use in Biblical-Theological hermeneutics cf. K.P.Aleaz, *The Role of Pramāṇas in Hindu-Christian Epistemology*, Calcutta: Punthi-Pustak, 1991.
32. Cf. D.M. Datta, "Verbal Testimony as a Source of Valid Cognition", *Recent Indian Philosophy, Papers selected from the Proceedings of the Indian Philosophical Congress, 1925-1934*, ed. by Kalidas Bhattacharya, Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 1963, pp.201-11.
33. D.M. Datta, *The Six Ways of Knowing*, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1972, pp.265-80; S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II., Bombay etc: Blackie & Sons, 1983, pp.106-109, 391. R.V. De smet, S.J., "The Theological Method of Śaṅkara", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Pontifical Georian University, Rome, 1953, p.178. Swami Madhavananda, *Vedānta Praibhāṣa of Dharmaraja Adhvarindra*, Belur: The Ramakrishna Mission Sarada Pitha, 1972, p.94.
34. Cf. Bharṭhari, *Vakyaṇpādīya*, First Kāṇḍa with commentary by Vrsabhadeva, ed. by Charudeva Sastri, Lahore : Ram Lal Kapoor Trust, 1939; First & Second Kāṇḍa with the commentary of Punyaraja and third Kāṇḍa with commentary by Helaraja, Banaras : Banaras Sanskrit Series, 1887. Bishnupada Bhattacharya, *A Study in Language and Meaning* Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1984, pp.1-15; D. M.Datta, *The Six Ways of Knowing*, *op.cit.*, pp.256-59. Śaṅkara, *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya*, 1.3.28
35. Swami Madhavanada, *Vedānta Paribhāṣa of Dharmaraja Adhvarindra*, *op.cit.*, pp.96-106; D.M.Datta, *The Six Ways of Knowing*, *op.cit.*, pp.289-94.
36. Chandradehar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, Delhi : Motilal Banarasidass, 1964, p.220.
37. Visvanatha Nyaya – Pancanana, *Bhāṣa-Pariccheda with Siddhānta-Muktāvali*, Calcutta : Advaita Ashrama, 1977, pp.166-72; D.M. Datta , *The Six Ways of Knowing* , *op.cit.*, pp.307-314; Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, *op.cit.*, p.204.
38. D.M. Datta , *The Six Ways of Knowing*, *op.cit.*, pp.339-51; Susil Kumar Maitra, *Fundamental Questions of Indian Metaphysics and Logic*, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1974, pp.243-50; Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol.I Cambridge: The University Press, 1922 , pp.186-88; 327-75.
39. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II. *op.cit.*, p.388; H. Hiriyantha, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, Bombay: George Allen & Unwin, 1973, p.319; R.V. Smet, S.J., "The Theological Method of Śaṅkara", *op.cit.*, pp.198-217.
40. Susil Kumar Mitra, *Fundamental Questions of Indian Metaphysics and logic*,

Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1974, pp.228-32. D.M. Datta, *The Six Ways of Knowing*, Calcutta : University of Calcutta, 1972, p.249.

- 41 D.M. Datta, *The Six Ways of Knowing*, *op.cit.*, pp.331-32 ,334.
- 42 Cf. K.P.Aleaz, "Word and Meaning in India Philosophy: Its possible contribution towards Indian Christian Hermeneutics" *The Indian Journal of Theology*, Vol. 32, Nos. 3 & 4, July-Dec. 1983. Pp.31-42.
- 43 Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, Texas: Fort Worth, 1976.
- 44 J.G.F. Collison, "Issues in the History of Biblical Hermeneutics. A Protestant perspective" *The Indian Journal of Theology*, Vol. 31, Nos. 3 & 4, July-Dec. 1982, p.229.
- 45 The position of Paul Gregorios. "Any Fruitful Indian discussion of hermeneutics must take into account the fact that scripture cannot be interpreted apart from tradition" may not be acceptable from the point of view of Mīmāṃsakas and Advaitins. Cf. Paul Gregorios, "Hermeneutics in India today in the light of the World Debate", *The Indian Journal of Theology*, Vol. 28, No.1. Jan-March 1979, p.14.
- 46 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, London: Sheed and Wardm 1975, p.239.
- 47 Arvind Sharma's claim, that the criterion for the validity of Śruti should be "a communal or collective intuition" which comes to be accepted by the 'standard mind of the community' is an idea foreign to the concept of Śruti as Śabda-pramāṇa in Indian philosophy. Cf. Arvind Sharma, "Can the Tanak, the Bible and the Quran be regarded as Sruti?", *The Indian Journal of Theology*, Vol. 28, No. 1, Jan-March, 1979,p.38.
- 48 cf. K.P. Aleaz, "Word and Meaning in India Philosophy: Its possible contribution towards Indian Christian Hermeneutics" *The Indian Journal of Theology*, Vol. 32, Nos.3 & 4 July- Dec.1983. pp.31-42.
- 49 Jn.15.1-17. Cf. Visvanatha Nyaya-Pancanana, *Bhāṣā-Pariccheda with Siddhānta-Muktāvali*, *op.cit.*, pp.158-65.
- 50 1 Cor. 12.1-31.
- 51 Cf. Bruce M. Meizger, "The Language of the New Testament". *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. VII, Nashville : Abingdon,1982, pp.53-59.
- 52 Visvanatha Nyaya – Pancanana, *Bhāṣā-Pariccheda with Siddhānta-Muktāvali*, *op.cit.*, pp.166-72; D.M.Datta, *The Six Ways of Knowing*, *op.cit.*, pp.307-314; Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, *op.cit.*, p.204.
- 53 Cf. John S. Kselman, "Modern New Testament Criticism" *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Bangalore: Theological Publication in India, 1982, pp.13-20; Alfred M. Perry, "The Growth of the Gospel", *The Interpreter's Bible*. Vol.VII, Nashville: Abingdom; 1982, pp.69-74.
- 54 Cf. Francis X.D'Sa, *Śabdaprāmāṇyam in Śabara and Kumarila. Towards a Study of the Mīmāṃsā Experience of Language*, Vienna: Indological Institute, University of Vienna, 1980;"Revelation without a God. Kumarila's theory of

Śabdaprāmāṇyam” in *Research Seminar on Non-Biblical Scriptures*, ed.by D.S.Amalorpavadass, Bangalore: NBCLL, 1974, pp.469-87.

- 55 Cf.K.P.Aleaz, “Word and Meaning in Indian Philosophy. Its possible Contribution towards Indian Christian Hermeneutics,” *The Indian Journal of Theology*, Vol.32, Nos.3 & 4, July-Dec. 1983, pp.31-42; *The Role of Pramāṇas in Hindu-Christian Epistemology*, *op.cit.* The recent work of Anand Amaladass, *Indian Exegesis. Hindu-Buddhist Hermeneutics*, Chennai : Satya Nilayam Publications, 2003, has of course indicated the Mīmāṃsā -Advaita Vedāntic hermeneutics of the Vedic Texts along with the Buddhist as well as Dhvani methods of interpretation. But his purpose for doing this is nothing more than a comparative reading of texts ( pp.128-29)similar to what Francis X. Clooney proposed in his books such as *Theology after Vedānta. An Experiment in Comparative Theology*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993 and *Seeing Through Texts. Doing Theology among the Srivaisnavas of South India*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996, Amaladass states that comparative reading of texts can enrich one’s faith. For example through this several Christian theological concepts like faith, revelation, inspiration, grace, incarnation etc can open up new horizons of understanding (*Indian Exegesis, op.cit.*,p.129). The method we suggest is different. We totally receive the Śabda method of hermeneutics of Mīmāṃsā-Advaita Vedānta as an Indian Christian method of Biblical-theological hermeneutics. As Indian Christians our very understanding and interpretation of Bible and theology is in terms of the Śabda method.

## VII

# HIGHLIGHTS ON INDIAN CONTRIBUTION TO A SPIRITUALITY OF PLURALISM

**P**luralism holds that other religions are equally salvific paths in terms of their perceptions of reality/ies, though these may vary from one's own. Spirituality of Pluralism means a religious experience of inter-faith relation built up on the perspective of Pluralism. Pluralism and consequently a Spirituality of Pluralism is upheld by many of the schools within the major Indian religions and some of the Indian Christians are inspired by this to follow their footsteps. The first section of the paper is on a Spirituality of Pluralism in other religions such as Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. Spirituality of Pluralism among Indian Christians is our focus in the second section. The third and final section indicates our concluding observations. The purpose of the paper is to show that a Spirituality of Pluralism has to become the central support of theological education to make it relevant in the Indian context.

### **1) A Spirituality of Pluralism in Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism.**

The Indian religio-cultural ethos encourages a Spirituality of Pluralism and we can be proud of this. A spirituality of pluralism of Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism provides us with many a liberative

resources to counter the exclusivist fundamentalism and communalism of the Sangh Parivar. It also encourages the Indian Christians to go beyond the exclusivism that is evident in Christian history.

*(a) A Hindu Perspective with special reference to Sri Ramakrishna*

The Hindu tradition has glorious religious resources within itself to counter the evils of exclusivism propagated by the Sangh Parivar because in it religious pluralism is theologically accepted and a spirituality of Pluralism is upheld in the following ways: <sup>1</sup> Already in the Ṛg Veda (1.164.46), by pointing out that Sat (Truth, Being) is one but sages call it by different names, Brahmanism tried to solve the clash between one religion and another. The Bhagavadgītā faced with the possibility of many *mārgas* (paths to God) suggested that those who worship other Gods in reality worship Krishna (9.23,24; 7.21; 4.11). The Orthodox Hindu argue for religious pluralism saying that plurality is rooted in the diversity of human nature itself, in the principle of *adhikārabheda* (difference in aptitude or competence) and therefore the question of superiority or ‘uniqueness’ of any one *dharma* over others does not arise. As per our aptitude, we can have our chosen deity (*iṣṭadevatā*). Again, the *svadharma* (perform one’s own duty) view of orthodox Hinduism points to an ethical system based on the plurality inherent in the social system, the goal here being the preservation of social and moral balance. The *bhakti* (devotion) tradition of Hinduism transcends all dogmatism as well as caste distinction. Further, Advaita Vedāntic experience centered on the Upanishads promotes harmony of religions in terms of the One Innermost Reality, Paramatman, of all. The Neo-Vedantins Swami Vivekananda, S. Radhakrishnan and others, reinterpreting Advaita, exhort to look for the essence of religion, the Religion of the Spirit, going beyond the externals, the doctrines and practices. According to them that is the approach of Hinduism and that is the way for mutual acceptance of diverse religious faiths. Swami Vivekananda’s teacher Sri Ramakrishna above all upheld pluralism by asserting that all the

diverse paths lead to the same goal. It is high time that the Sangh Parivar takes note of this affirmation of the glory of Pluralism by their own religious faith.

Hinduism's attitude toward other religions has more or less remained constant throughout its long history. There is the same divine reality that manifests itself in diverse forms. The various religious faiths are simply different receptacles of the divine reality. In this recognition of other faiths as being different receptacles of the divine reality and as providing different paths by which devotees may attain liberation, Hinduism sees itself as being a very open and tolerant religion and this glorious truth as such is what is undermined by the Fundamentalism of the Sangh Parivar.<sup>2</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886) of Bengal deserves our special attention as he was a pluralist through and through and he is inspiring all Indians specially the Bengalis and the culture of Bengal to be open today. He had deep Goddess experience and he got initiated by one teacher after another in different ways of realizing God; in Tantrism by Bhairavi, in Vaishnavism by Jatadhari and in Advaita by Tota Puri. He practiced Islam in 1866 and he had Christ experience in 1874.<sup>3</sup> His was thus a spirituality of Pluralism in total practice.

Sri Ramakrishna compares God to a chameleon, which changes colour, and for him those who quarrel about the doctrines of God are like those who quarrel about the colour of the chameleon. God reveals Himself/Herself to seekers in various forms and aspects. All paths lead to God. People worship God according to their tastes and temperaments and this is like different children eating different dishes cooked by mother as per one's taste. To quote: "Don't you know what difference in taste is? Some enjoy fish curry, some, fried fish; some pickled fish; and again, some, the rich dish of fish pilau."<sup>4</sup>

According to Sri Ramakrishna different religions address the same reality in different ways: it is like children addressing the same father differently; the elder ones may call him distinctly as Baba or Papa, but

the babies can at best call him Ba and Pa. Surely the father will not mind. He knows that they too are calling him. Only they cannot pronounce his name well.<sup>5</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna was of the following firm conviction: “God can be realized through all paths. All religions are true.”<sup>6</sup> He explained this through the analogy of reaching the roof through different ways either by stone stairs or wooden stairs or bamboo steps or by a rope or a bamboo pole.<sup>7</sup> He expounds the same truth through another analogy: ‘It is like your coming to Dakshineswar by carriage, by boat, by steamer, or on foot. You have chosen the way according to your convenience and tastes; but the destination is the same. Some of you have arrived earlier than others, but all have arrived.’<sup>8</sup>

In the view of Sri Ramakrishna, dogmatists are those who see only one aspect of God and limit God to that aspect; they are like the blind people who examined the elephant and came to different conclusions and quarreled about their partial or limited standpoints.<sup>9</sup> He further said. “He is indeed a real man who had harmonized everything. Most people are one sided. But I find that all opinions point to the One. All views...have that One for their centre. He who is formless, again, is endowed with form. The attributeless Brahman is my Father. God with attributes is my Mother...”<sup>10</sup> Thus in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna we get a taste of an exposition of a spirituality of pluralism.

*(b) Syādvāda of Jainism: An Indian Contribution to a Spirituality of Pluralism.*

For Jainism all objects of the world are multiform (*anekānta*) and each of these substances has innumerable characters (*dharmas*), both positive and negative, essential and accidental. This contention is called relative pluralism. Further, Jaina thought will hold that reality can be considered from different point of view or standpoints or *nayas*. No judgment is absolute, all of them being relative. Perhaps the most important feature of Jaina philosophy is its respect for all opinions

implied in this conception. Every object has infinite aspects judged from different point of views. Every judgment is true only in relation to a particular aspect of the thing seen from a particular point of view and hence is not the whole truth. This is Syādvāda. There are seven ways of predication and this is called *saptabhaṅgī*.<sup>11</sup> Here is implied a spirituality of pluralism in its perfection.

Every judgment that we pass in daily life about an object is true only in reference to the standpoint occupied and the aspect of the objects considered. We quarrel and disagree because we forget this, e.g. the blind people's idea of an elephant and the subsequent quarrel. The different systems of philosophy according to Jainas, represent different partial aspects of reality. Accordingly they insist that every judgment should be qualified by some word like 'syat' (i.e., in some respect) so that the limitation of this judgment and the possibility of other alternative judgments from other points of views may be always clearly borne in mind. Thus instead of a judgment like 'the elephant is like a pillar', it should be said, to remove the chance of confusion 'in respect of its legs, the elephant is like a pillar'. This theory of the Jainas is called Syādvāda. The principal underlying Syādvāda makes Jaina thinkers catholic in their outlook; they go beyond the limitations of narrow dogmatism (*ekānta-vāda*). Their perspective is the opposite, *anekāntavāda*. The metaphysical sides that reality has innumerable characters is called *anekāntavāda*, while the epistemological and logical side that we can know only some aspect of reality and therefore all our judgments are necessarily relative, is called syādvāda.<sup>12</sup>

*Bhaṅgavāda* is the doctrine of manifold judgment and the Jaina epistemology recognizes seven forms of judgments (*saptabhaṅgī*). It has been pointed out that<sup>13</sup> we can know a thing in relation to its own matter, form, space and time as a positive reality. But in relating to others' matter, form, space and time that thing becomes a negative entity. When we affirm the two different standpoints successively we get the third judgment that a thing is both real and unreal. When affirm

or deny existence and non-existence simultaneously to any thing it becomes indescribable and this is the fourth judgment. The remaining three judgments are combinations of the fourth with the first, second and third respectively. There is a possibility of seven modes only with respect to the affirmation and negation of each modification in a single entity though the groups of seven modes may be infinite because of the infinite modifications.

Vardhamana Mahavira (599-527 BCE), the twenty-fourth Tīrthaṅkar who was a contemporary of Buddha as well as Buddha owed some of their conceptions to the ‘heretics’ of the day and formulated others under the influence of the controversies which were going on with them. Thus, Hermann Jacobi thought that in opposition to the Agnosticism (*Ajñānavāda*) of Sanjaya, Mahavir has established the Syādvāda. To quote:

For as the *Ajñānavāda* declares that of a thing beyond our experience the existence, or non-existence or simultaneously existence and non-existence can neither be affirmed nor denied, so in a similar way, but one leading to contrary result, the *Syādvāda* declares that ‘you can affirm the existence of a thing from one point of view (*syād asti*), deny it from another (*syad nāsti*); and affirm both existence and non-existence with reference to it at different times (*syād asti nāsti*). If you should think of affirming existence and non-existence at the same time from the same point of view, you must say that the thing cannot be spoken (*syād avaktavyaḥ*). Similar, under certain circumstances, the affirmation of existence is not possible (*syād asti avaktavyaḥ*); of non-existence (*syād nāsti avaktavyaḥ*); and also of both (*syād asti nāsti avaktavyaḥ*).<sup>14</sup>

Regarding the history of Syādvāda<sup>15</sup> we should note that reference to Syādvāda occurs in the writings of Bhadrabahu who is believed to have given the following explanation: *syat*-may be, *vada*-assertion i.e., the assertion of possibilities. There were a senior (433-357 BCE) and junior (ca.375 CE) Bhadrabahu and we are not sure who gave

the above explanation though it is usually ascribed to the senior Bhadrabahu. There is clear mention of Syādvāda in the *Nyāyāvatāra* of Siddhasena Divakara (ca. 480-550 CE). Samantabhadra (ca. 600 CE) has given a full exposition of the seven parts of Syādvāda or *saptabhaṅgīnaya* in his *Āptamīmāṃsā*. So it is clear that Syādvāda was well developed by the sixth c. CE. In the mediaeval period of Indian logic this theory received a great deal of attention. For example in the 13<sup>th</sup> c. we have a separate treatise entitled *Syādvādamāñjari* by Mallisena. There are many still later works on the subject such as Vimala Dasa's *Saptabhaṅgītaraṅgiṇī*.

### (c) A Spirituality of Pluralism in Buddhism

A claim is made that in a thoroughly Buddhist country there is no place for violence of any kind. There will not be any violence in the relation between Buddhists and people of other faiths as well as in any other aspect. True, in some countries such as Sri Lanka, where in the past Buddhists have suffered from the hostility and aggression of other religions, there has sometimes developed a defensive attitude of a slightly hostile kind but this is not characteristic of countries, for example Thailand. In Thailand, the king, who is himself a devout Buddhist, regards it as his duty to protect and support all other religions and their adherents, whether Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim or Christian.<sup>16</sup>

The Buddhist attitude to other religions is basically the expression of following views conducive to a spirituality of pluralism:<sup>17</sup> First, since no human being can know everything or understand everything, and there is much we do not know or understand, only the bigot or the fool can claim to be so sure about things which are uncertain that he/she can condemn another person's faith as totally wrong. The Buddhist prefers to concentrate upon what is known and what is affirmed, honouring and witnessing these things and respecting the opinion of others. This is an important reason why Buddhism has been filled with the spirit of tolerance. Secondly Buddhism has the conception that all truth concerning human person and his/her nature and the

spiritual dimension of his/her existence, wherever it is found is consonant with the truth proclaimed by the Buddha and is to be welcomed since truth is one and indivisible. Thirdly, Buddhism affirms that even where there are difficulties in reconciling one view and another, and consequently there is genuine disagreement, one thing that will not help is aggressiveness. It is unprofitable and harmful to all concerned to adopt an attitude towards another person or group of people, which is basically one of pride or hatred. As the Dhammapada says, enmity is never overcome by enmity; enmity is only overcome by love.

It is not easy to have a firm religious conviction and yet to be tolerant of those whose views are different from one's own; but the Buddhists have on the whole achieved this kind of tolerance. It has been shown to other major religions such as Hinduism, Islam and Christianity as well as to the Tribal religions with which Buddhism has come into contact in the course of its history. For example, in South-East Asia, the Buddhist monks did not denounce the beliefs and customs of the people of the countries into which they came. Not all the beliefs and customs held earlier were discarded; rather, some have been incorporated into Buddhist practice in order to help ordinary village people in Thailand, Myanmar, China, Korea, Japan, Tibet etc. to feel at home within the Buddhist religion.<sup>18</sup>

The 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.E. Buddhist emperor Asoka emphatically enjoined religious toleration and included Brahmins and ascetics, and followers of sects of various kinds in his unceasing benevolence. This wide tolerance shown by Asoka is characteristic of Buddhism throughout its history. Nowhere was Buddhism's progress sought by its missionaries by any means other than those of persuasion. The missionaries claimed no privileges either for themselves or for their countries, but merely promoted Buddhism's ideals of kindness and peace paying little or no attention to problems of efficient organization, the founding of places of worship or the establishment of ecclesiastical

authority. When one looks back on the history of Buddhism one cannot help marveling at the rapidity with which Buddhist missionaries won over millions of people in many countries to a Buddhist way of life.<sup>19</sup> Buddhism has never claimed any exclusive power to divide humankind into two groups, the saved and the lost. Its long history has no blots of persecutions or inquisitions. Buddhism has always been considerate to those outside its fold. Even within its own ranks, differences of opinion were settled by quiet adjustment and general sanction, with no heat of temper being allowed to mar the serenity of the proceedings. Buddhism has thus displayed great variety and freedom of thought.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to the attitude of tolerance Buddhism's stress on compassion provides a natural point of contact with other religions. The Buddhist approach of tolerance is also based on a causal conception of nature or the theory of Dependent Origination (*pratītyasamutpāda vāda*). This is a causal system in which there are physical, biological, and psychological as well as moral and spiritual laws. Buddha has discovered this law of causation as the true description of reality. He passes this on to others not to be accepted on his authority but to be tested in their own critical experience. Rather than proceeding by blind faith or authority either scriptural or institutional, Buddha taught a 'provisional faith' which was then to be tested by the individual's personal experience.<sup>21</sup>

The tolerant attitude of the Buddha toward the plurality of religious views is shaped into a rigorous philosophical approach by the Madhyamika Buddhists of the Mahayana branch. The goal of Madhyamika is the removal of ego-attachment to any religious philosophy or theology so that true spirituality can be experienced and lived. Buddha is seen as the physician who prescribes the correct medicine to cure the disease of ego-attachment to religious philosophies or theologies. If, as the Buddha discovered, the goal of religion is compassion, then, say the Madhyamika, the biggest obstacle to realizing that goal is attachment to our own religious beliefs in such a way as to

make them absolute. Philosophy, theology and scripture can play the role of guides; can provide the contents for 'provisional faith'. But as soon as such view- points become attached to the ego and made absolute, they destroy the capacities for tolerance, objective criticism, and compassionate action.<sup>22</sup> A spirituality of pluralism emerges from detachment and compassion.

## 2. A Spirituality of Pluralism among Indian Christians

A Spirituality of Pluralism has existed among the Indian Christians from the beginning of the C.E. and it is only further encouraged today by the spirituality of pluralism of other religious faiths.

### *(a) Thomas Christians' Theology of Religions that endorsed a Spirituality of Pluralism.*

From an analysis of the Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Diamper<sup>23</sup> of 1599 imposed by Portuguese Roman Catholic intruders we are able today to infer the theology of religions of the Thomas Christians who were living in India since the 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE. In their theology they held Pluralism and in social life they followed the perspective of Pluralistic Inclusivism, i.e., receiving aspects from the other. In Kerala there existed the spirit of mutual acceptance among the communities of Hindus and Christians and the prohibitions and restrictions imposed by the Synod of Diamper witness to this communal harmony. Acts III. Decree 4 of the Synod says: "That everyone may be saved in his own law; all which are good, and lead men to heaven. Now this is a manifest heresy; there being no other law upon earth in which salvation is to be found, besides that of our Savior Christ..." What we can infer from this is, the Thomas Christians upheld Pluralism in theology of religions. They had the vision to see that a Hindu can be saved in his/her own *dharma*. A spirituality of pluralism emerges from such a conviction.

The regret of the Synod was that in social life there were no external signs to distinguish Christians from the *nayaras* (the chivalry

class of Kerala); in dress, hairstyle, in everything they followed the same pattern. The decree of the Synod that Christians desist from boring ear lobes (IXC.17) can very well be understood against such a background. There were other prohibitions by the Synod on matters such as: use of 'non-Christian names' (IV.16, and 17); Hindu musicians singing in Churches (V.14); sending children to schools run by Hindu *panicars* (teachers) and Christian *panicars* keeping Hindu idols in their schools for the sake of the Hindu children attending lessons (III.12, 13); the clergy eating with the Hindus (VII.11), etc. The Synod recommended strongly that the Christians live together remote from the 'danger' of communication with non-Christians (IX.23). All these point to the social harmony existed among Hindus and Christians of Kerala. In social life the Thomas Christians followed the perspective of Pluralistic Inclusivism. The local churches functioned in tune with the social and religious customs of Kerala. The government of the Hindu temples and their properties were done effectively by 'Yogam' or assembly of the local people. The Thomas Christians imbibed this democratic system of government in their parishes. The local church councils (*palliyogam*) looked after the temporal matters and the ecclesiastical discipline of the community and the bishops had no temporal or administrative authority over the local churches. The present system of the Bishops having temporal power of the church came into being only after the arrival of the Portuguese. The Bishop had only limited ecclesiastical powers like consecrating the church, administering baptism and ordaining *Cathenars* and they did this on the request of the local congregation and not independently of the *palliyogam*. Celibacy of the clergy, their transfer and giving salary by the Bishop were introduced by the Portuguese rulers. Thus, religious pluralism blessed the Thomas Christians to evolve their own ecclesiology with an emphasis on democracy and decentralization and whenever they deviate from this emphasis of a spirituality of pluralism their past will continue to inspire them for correction.<sup>24</sup>

(b) *S.K. George and Manilal C. Parekh as upholding a Spirituality of Pluralism in Theology of Religions:*

In this context it is important to note that S. K. George (1900-1960) and Manilal C Parekh (1885-1967) held pluralism in theology of religions since 1920s and 1930s respectively and S. J. Samartha joined them in the 1990s.<sup>25</sup> For S.K. George redemptive suffering love manifested in the Cross of Christ is the central principal of Christianity and the manifestation of it in a practice and not the preaching of any dogma, is what is needed. Mahatma Gandhi's satyagraha movement was for him Cross in action and he joined in it wholeheartedly in 1932 resigning a secure teaching job at Bishop's College, Calcutta.<sup>26</sup> Even prior to this as a Bachelor of Divinity student of Bishop's College (1924-27), he had his doubts about the exclusive divinity of Christ. As early as 1937 S.K. George helped in organizing the All Kerala Inter-religious Students Fellowship, which tried to bring together students of various religions for mutual understanding and co-operation. The first conference of the Fellowship was held at Alwaye in May 1937 and adopted its Aim and Basis which says:

Amidst the conflicting claims made on behalf of different religions...we believe there is an urgent need for a full and free exchange of our differing religious experiences, in a spirit of mutual respect, appreciation and sympathy. We consider that for such mutual respect and sympathy to be real it is absolutely necessary that no member of the Fellowship should claim for his religion any exclusive and final possession of truth. We believe that such an interchange of experience will lead to:

- (a) An enrichment of one another's religious life;
- (b) Mutual respect, understanding and tolerance; and
- (c) Cooperation in purifying and strengthening the religious attitude of mind... from which our...problems have to be tackled.<sup>27</sup>

The Fellowship will explore fully the value of all the different religious traditions and disciplines and present them for the benefit of all. But at the same time nobody in the Fellowship is persuaded to join

another's religious belief and practice. To weaken the hold of the truth of any religion upon humankind was considered as to weaken religion itself and hence the Fellowship is to strive for the opposite. The Fellowship was to help one another to understand and to live up to the best in all religions.<sup>28</sup>

S.K. George had the conviction that the hope of world unity and human fellowship lies through inter-religious cooperation. Inter-religious movement can eliminate religious conflicts and intolerances. The spirit of co-operation, which he found among Christians, he wanted to be extended to include the different religions as well.<sup>29</sup> In his view inter-religious movement faces many misunderstandings. One charge is that it is syncretistic and will but result in adding one or more new fancy religions to the crowded world of religions. The clarification given by George in this context is:

...The inter-religious movement does not aim at evolving a single universal religion for all mankind. That...is the dream of the militant missionary faiths, which would blot out all other religions. What inter-religionism stands for is the acceptance of the need and the fact of variety in religious experience, of diversity in man's approach towards and realization of the One Eternal Reality, which is the common object of religious quest throughout the ages. It admits the limitations of all human understanding of the Divine-even unique revelations are mediated through human channels-and is, therefore, humble and willing to accept light from various sources. It accepts the revelations through the spiritual geniuses of all mankind and while it does not aim at, or believe in, evolving a uniformity of creed and conduct, it looks forwards to a time when the spiritually minded of all religions will unite in the appreciation of all known truth and is welcoming fresh revelations from the unspent deep resources of God.<sup>30</sup>

The Fellowship of the Friends of Truth started in 1951 and whose secretary for the first seven years was S.K. George, was functioning in such a spirit as an inter-religious movement.

According to George the place of Jesus Christ in the Hindu religious heritage of India is as one of the *Ishta Devatas* or chosen deities or

favorite deities. Hinduism readily grants such a place to Jesus Christ. From the side of a disciple of Jesus what is needed is, he/she must not deny other mediators between God and humans, other experiences of God's presence in the human heart, the validity of other *Ishta Devatas*. Such denials lie outside the positive experience of the Christians and therefore have no validity.<sup>31</sup> Such an affirmation provides the foundation for a spirituality of Pluralism.

Manilal C. Paarekh was born in a Jain home in Rajkot, Gujarat. He was introduced to Hindu Vaishnava *Bhakti* by his father. A serious illness helped him to experience Theism. He came under the influence of the writings of Keshub Chunder Sen and served for some years as a *pracaraka* of the Church of the New Dispensation in Sindh and Bombay. The next stage in his pilgrimage was his growing interest in Christ, towards whom Keshub had so firmly pointed. The serious illness tuberculosis gave him opportunity for study and reflection. He studied Bible and the *Vacanāmṛit* of Swami Narayana, the famous Gujarati Vaishnava religious and social reformer of the early 19<sup>th</sup> c. The study of Vaishnava *Bhakti* led him beyond the rationalism of the Brahmo Samaj to the conviction that God becomes incarnate and this belief in turn pointed him on to Christ of whom he read in the New Testament.<sup>32</sup>

Parekh was baptized in the Anglican Church in Bombay in 1918. He considered baptism as only a spiritual matter. He became disillusioned with the Westernization of the Indian Christian Community. He wanted a 'Hindu Church of Christ' free from Western influence. He now strongly felt that the new disciple of Christ should remain within his/her own community, witnessing from there. He drew a clear distinction between 'evangelism' i.e., proclamation of the Gospel to individuals and 'proselytism' by which he meant mass-conversion by dubious means. He like Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya (1861-1907) of Bengal made a distinction between *samaj dharma* (social aspect of religion) and *moksha dharma* (spiritual aspect). Christianity should be *moksha dharma* only.<sup>33</sup>

By the end of 1930s, Parekh came to the final stage of his spiritual pilgrimage, namely *Bhagavata Dharma*. He conceived *Bhagavata Dharma* as a universal personal religion of devotion in which Christian devotion is one element among others, perhaps the central and organizing element. He used this term to describe a religion of personal *Bhakti*, which is seen at its clearest in Christianity and Vaishnavism, but is also seen in all other theistic faiths. He included in it Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Zoroastrianism and all the religions, which believe in God. His bitter experiences in both Brahmo Samaj and Christian Church had eventually brought him to the conclusion that change of religion is undesirable, since it tends to lead to exclusiveness and communalism. For the New Harmony which he was evolving, he wanted a name, which avoids the implication that one particular tradition had a monopoly of the truth, and this he found in *Bhagavata Dharma*.<sup>34</sup> *Bhagavata Dharma* truly represents a spirituality of pluralism.

### 3. Conclusion

The following are our findings of the above discussion: (a) Pluralism is theologically accepted in Hinduism in terms of Vedic affirmation, in terms of the conceptions of *adhikārabheda*, *svadharma*, many *mārgas*, Bhakti tradition, Advaita Vedāntic experience and Neo-Vedāntic interpretations. (b) Sri Ramakrishna's was a spirituality of pluralism in total practice. In his view God reveals Himself/Herself to seekers in various forms and aspects. People worship the same God differently according to their tastes and temperaments. God can be realized through all the diverse paths. (c) Syādvāda of Jainism implies a spirituality of pluralism in its perfection. According to it every object has infinite aspects judged from different point of views. Every judgment is true only in relation to a particular aspect of the thing seen from a particular point of view and hence is not the whole truth. Therefore it is desirable to qualify every judgment by some word like 'Syat' (i.e., in some respect). (d) Buddhism encourages non-violent

relation between religions in terms of compassion and love. Religious tolerance is based on a causal conception of nature (*Pratītyasamutpāda vāda*) that is to be tested through one's own experience. The removal of ego-attachment to any religious philosophy or theology makes it in line with a spirituality of pluralism that overcomes exclusivism. (e) A spirituality of pluralism has existed among the Indian Christians from the beginning of the C.E. and this we can identify in terms of an analysis of the Acts and Decrees of the Synod of Diamper of 1599. The Thomas Christians held the pluralist perspective that everyone may be saved in his/her own dharma. In social life they were in line with the Hindu community. The local churches functioned in tune with the social and religious customs of the Hindu temples. (f) According to S.K. George the place of Jesus Christ in the Hindu religious heritage of India is as one of the *Ishta Devatas*. From the side of the disciples of Jesus, the need is not to deny other mediators, other *Ishta Devatas*, other experiences of God's presence in the human heart. The redemptive suffering love manifested in the Cross has to be made the central principle of Christianity to arrive at a spirituality of pluralism. (g) Manilal C. Parekh wanted a Hindu Church of Christ and tried to present to us a Hindu portrait of Christ, explaining Christian faith as a *moksha dharma*. He conceived *Bhāgavata Dharma* as a universal personal religion of devotion in which Christian devotion is one prominent element. *Bhāgavata Dharma* represents a spirituality of pluralism. Such a spirituality of pluralism as emerging from India has to become the backbone of theological education to make theological education relevant in the Indian context.

### Notes

1. K.P.Alcaz, *Dimensions of Indian Religion. Study, Experience and Interaction*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1995, pp.265-67
2. Cf. Harold Coward, *Pluralism. Challenge to World Religions*, Marynoll: Orbis Books, 1985, pp.63-80
3. K.P.Alcaz, *Harmony of Religions: The Relevance of Swami Vivekananda*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1993, pp.33-44.

4. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (G.R.) (Original in Bengali by Mahendranath Gupta (M) a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and translated by Swami Nikhilananda), Vol. II. 8<sup>th</sup> Edition, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1985, pp. 910-11; Cf. G.R., Vol. I, p.149, Vol. II, pp. 559, 859.
5. *G. R.*, Vol. I, p.112.
6. *Ibid.*, p.111.
7. *Ibid.*, p.514.
8. *G. R.*, Vol. II, p.1010.
9. *G. R.*, Vol. I. p.191.
10. *Ibid.*, p.490.
11. Cf. K. P. Aleaz, "Syadvada: An Indian Contribution to Pluralism", *Bangalore Theological Forum*, Vol. XXXIII, No.1, June 2001, pp.133-44.
12. Satischandra Chatterjee and Dhirendramohan Datta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1968, p.82; Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, Cambridge University Press, 1922, p.181.
13. Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, Delhi etc.: Motilal Banarasidass, 1964, pp.53-54.
14. Hermann Jacobi (trans.), *Jaina Sutras, Part II, The Uttaradhyayana Sutra. The Sutrakritanga Sutra*, Delhi: AVF Books distributors, Reprinted 1987, S.B.E. Series Vol. 45, Introduction pp. XXVII-VIII.
15. Cf. Satis Chandra Vidyabhusana, *A History of Indian Logic*, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1921, pp.167-84. For an English translation of Syādvādamāñjari Cf. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (ed.), *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973, pp.260-68.
16. Trevor Ling, *Buddhism*, London: Ward Lock Educational, 1971, pp.26-27.
17. *Ibid.*, p.27.
18. *Ibid.*
19. G.P. Malasekera, "Part I", in *Buddhist Concepts. Old and New*, ed. By Buddhadasa P. Kirthisinghe, Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1983, pp.54-57.
20. *Ibid.*, p.56
21. Harold Coward, *Pluralism, Challenge to World Religions*, Op. Cit., pp.81, 84-85.
22. *Ibid.*, pp.88-89.
23. Scaria Zacharia (ed.), *The Acts Decrees of the Synod of Diamper 1599*, Edamattam: Indian Institute of Christian Studies, 1944; Mathias Mundadan, *Emergence of the Catholic Theological Consciousness*. Documentation No.7, Alwaye: St. Thomas Academy for Research (STAR), July 1985, pp.5-6; K.P. Aleaz, *Dimensions of Indian Religion. Study, Experience and interaction*, Op.Cit., pp.219-22.
24. Cf. *The Indian Journal of Theology*, Vol.34, No. 1-3, Jan-Sept.1985. The whole issue is devoted to Kerala ecclesiology. Cf. pp.17-18, 89-98, 99.
25. Cf. S.J. Samartha, *One Christ Many Religions*, Bangalore: Sathri, 1992.
26. Cf. K.P.Aleaz, "S. K. George: A Pioneer Pluralist and Dalit Theologian", *Bangalore Theological Forum*, Vol. XXXII, No. 1, June 2000, pp.91-111; S. K.

George, *Gandhi's Challenge to Christianity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1947.

27. *Ibid.*, p.80.
28. *Ibid.*, pp.80-91.
29. *Ibid.*, p.52.
30. *Ibid.*, p.53-54.
31. *Ibid.*, p.48; S.K. George, "Christianity in Independent India", in S.K. George *Souvenir, The FFT Quarterly*, Vol.7, Nos. 1& 2, Oct. 1959 and Jan. 1960, p.37.
32. Cf. R. H. S. Boyd (ed.), *Manilal C. Parekh 1885-1967 Dhanjibhai Fakirbhai 1895-1967. A Selection*, Madras: CLS, 1974.
33. K.P. Aleaz, *Religions in Christian Theology*, Kolkata: Punthi Pustak, 2001, pp.95-96.
34. *Ibid.*, p.97. Cf. Manilal C. Parekh, *A Hindu Portrait of Jesus Christ*, Rajkot: Sri Bhagavata Dharma Mission, 1953; *Christian Proselytism in India – a Great and Growing Menace*, Rajkot, 1947.

## VIII

# FOR A CONVERGENCE OF DALIT – ADVAITA THEOLOGIES

**T**his chapter attempts to demonstrate that Advaita theology is not anti-Dalit theology, rather on the one hand Advaita can provide deeper foundations for Dalit theology and on the other it is Dalit theology that proclaims Advaita Vedanta practically. This is done in terms of a study of the life and thought of two prominent socio-religious leaders of India namely Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) and Sri Narayana Guru (1854-1928). If the first section is on the thought of Swami Vivekananda, the second deals with the life and teachings of Sri Narayana Guru. The third and final section presents our concluding observations.

### **1. The meeting of Dalit-Advaita theologies in the thought of Swami Vivekananda**

Swami Vivekananda thought that the idea of Vedānta is to harmonize all<sup>1</sup> and he specially saw religious harmony in terms of practical Vedānta, which teaches the service of God in all jīvas.<sup>2</sup> His was practical Vedānta inspired through the liberal ideas of Sri Ramakrishna, wherein there was place equally for a Chandala and Brahmin.<sup>3</sup> “All this manifoldness is the manifestation of that One. That One is manifesting Himself as many, as matter, spirit, mind, thought

and everything else”.<sup>4</sup> “The theme of the Vedānta is to see the Lord in everything, to see things in their real nature, not as they appear to be”.<sup>5</sup> The Swamiji understood by the Ātman not the individual ego but the All-pervading Lord, residing as the Self and Internal Ruler in all. He is perceived by all as the sum total. This being so, as Jīva and īśvara are in essence the same, serving the Jīvas and loving God must mean one and the same thing.<sup>6</sup> Asking them to specially remember, the Swmiji told his disciples that after so much austerity, the truth he has understood is: God is present in every Jīva; there is no other God besides that and those who serve Jīvas, serve God indeed. The Ramakrishna Mission, which Swami Vivekananda founded, remembers this advice in its vision and work and the social services it carries out bear witness to this.<sup>7</sup>

According to Swami Vivekananda one should share the taste of Advaita realization with others; one has to liberate the whole universe before leaving this body. One who is established in the bliss of the Infinite will feel the whole sentient and insentient world, as one’s own Self. Then that person cannot help treating all people with the same kindness as he/she shows towards himself/herself. This is what the Swamiji meant by Practical Vedānta.<sup>8</sup> The Swamiji has exhorted thus: “Raise once more that mighty banner of Advaita for on no other ground can you have that wonderful love until you see that the same Lord is present everywhere. Unfurl that banner of love.”<sup>9</sup> In his view it is the Vedānta philosophy which establishes the basic metaphysical truth underlying all ethical codes like ‘do not kill, do not injure; love your neighbour as yourself’. The metaphysical truth is, Ātman is absolute, all-pervading and infinite and each individual soul is a part and parcel of that Universal Soul. Therefore in injuring one’s neighbour, a person actually injures oneself.<sup>10</sup> It is thus Advaita Vedānta, which gives a philosophical basis for equality; for social justice. It is Advaita, which inspires us to arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached. In the Chicago Parliament of Religions, 1893, Swami Vivekananda suggested that we should go beyond the conception of the Fatherhood of God

and the consequent brotherhood/sisterhood of humans in order to arrive at an ideological basis for loving the whole humanity. It is the potential divinity of humans, which can function as a sound basis for human love and concern for each other. “I think we should love our brother whether we believe in the universal fatherhood of God or not, because every religion and every creed recognizes man as divine, and you should do him no harm that you might not injure that which is divine in him”.<sup>11</sup>

Swami Vivekananda exhorted his disciples to open their eyes against the evils of caste system and untouchability.<sup>12</sup> Caste system according to the Swamiji is only a social custom and is opposed to the religion of the Vedānta.<sup>13</sup> Practical Vedānta is the attainment of freedom, physical, mental and spiritual, for us and for others and “those social rules which stand in the way of the unfoldment of this freedom are injurious, and steps should be taken to destroy them speedily”.<sup>14</sup> Not birth but the *guṇas* should decide the caste, e.g. the Sattvikas are Brahmins.<sup>15</sup> Also, in one sense caste is inevitable because people have to form themselves into groups. But that does not mean there should be privileges.<sup>16</sup> “None can be Vedantists, and at the same time admit of privileges of any one, either mental, physical, or spiritual; absolutely no privileges for anyone. The same power is in every man...; the same potentiality is in everyone.... The idea that one man is born superior to another has no meaning in the Vedānta”.<sup>17</sup> “In the Ātman there is no distinction of sex, or Varṇa or Āshrama, or anything of the kind...”.<sup>18</sup> India cannot awaken and progress unless the poor untouchables are also fully incorporated in its life. The Swamiji said:

I see clear as daylight that there is the one Brahman in all, in them and me- one Shakti dwells in all. The only difference is of manifestation. Unless the blood circulates over the whole body, has any country risen at any time? If one limb is paralyzed, then even with the other limbs whole, no much can be done with that body – know this for certain.<sup>19</sup>

The Practical Vedanta of Swami Vivekananda thus stands for the cause of the Dalits. One greatness of his thought lies in its bringing

together of the people of upper castes and the Dalits through the philosophy of Advaita Vedānta. There is no need for the Dalits to revolt against the Upaniṣads and the Advaita Vedānta which in reality stand for their cause. The revolt of the Dalits has to be against those upper castes who are ignorant of the teaching of equality of the Upaniṣāds and its systematization in Advaita Vedānta. There is much possibility for synthesis of Vedantic and Dalit theologies and this insight was implicitly proclaimed by Swami Vivekananda as early as the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. and today the Dalit theologians and those who fight for the cause of Dalits can be greatly enlightened by this.<sup>20</sup> If the Dalit theologians hold that the sufferings of the Dalits should be the basis or starting point of Dalit theology, Swami Vivekananda is inspiring them to add to it the basis of the one Innermost Ātman shared by all alike as well.<sup>21</sup>

## **2. The Life and Thought of Sri Narayana Guru, the Dalit-Vedantin.**

Advaita Vedanta and Dalit theology meet in the thought and activities of Sri Narayana Guru. Sri Narayana Guru belonged to the untouchable Ezava community of Kerala and he upheld Advaita Vedānta as his religious philosophy. In his time the untouchables including the Ezavas were driven away over from public roads and public places due to the strict observance of caste pollution. The Ezava community had no access to *savarna* temples or educational institutions. A radical religious change for the untouchable began in 1888 when Sri Narayana Guru installed a stone from the Neyyar river at Aruvippuram, near Thiruvananthapuram as a Siva Linga and called the deity as 'Ezava Siva'. At Aruvippuram soon came up a monastery. In 1899 a Society was given shape to for the management of the temple affairs and later it was converted into the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam in 1903. The Guru gave great importance to educate the common people including women. Become free through education, through knowledge, was his emphasis and he fought against

all evil social customs on the one hand and for human rights on the other in terms of upholding Advaita thought.<sup>22</sup>

The most important message Sri Narayana Guru communicated was ‘one caste, one religion, one God for human person’.<sup>23</sup> This ‘one religion’ was centered on the Non-dual Supreme Reality Brahman-Ātman. He over-ruled caste through Advaita thought and therefore Advaita theology could become Dalit theology in and through the life and work of Sri Narayana Guru. For example in *Ātmopadeśa-satakam* he stressed that true love of self is actually love of others. The act, which brings good, is that which brings satisfaction to others.<sup>24</sup> The perceptible world is not basically different from the self. If, therefore, this self- founded value is recognized, a duty comes upon us, especially towards others, including plant and animal life, to treat them as one’s own self. The quest then would be for an ideal life based on understanding, love and equality.<sup>25</sup> This is the basis and significance of Narayana Guru’s Advaita. The Guru wanted all to live as one single human community, whatever be the religion. His philosophy was to unite the humanity as a whole and also harmonize the various religions so that every body could share the love and spirit of unity. The broad outlook that all religions have one and the same essence is the protective shield of the mind against religious bigotry and miseries resulting from it. In other words, the concept of ‘one religion’ is a call for human dignity, which in essence gives every person the responsibility of preserving the honour and freedom of their fellow persons regarding their distinctive religious identities and to live in equality and well-being. This dictum is based upon an Advaitic approach to religion and life.<sup>26</sup>

As Guru’s ‘one religion’ is proposed in the context of his discussion on caste, we may have to understand his conception of Caste. In the poem on caste Guru looks at the tension between Brahminhood and Pariahhood in the caste structure and finds it to be an unjustifiable illusion. He was convinced that the existence of caste was due to

ignorance (*avidyā*) and spiritual enlightenment (*vidyā*) would liberate people from the illusion that caste differences are essential. Humans belong to the human caste. As bovinity to the cow humanness to humans is the symbol of human caste. All humans belong to one species and to speak of Jāti is equivalent to separating humankind into different species.<sup>27</sup> Only same species can reproduce and what is reproduced is the same kind of offsprings and consequently at the time of birth there is no caste. Outwardly and inwardly there is no difference among the so-called upper and lower caste people.<sup>28</sup> It is the conduct, which counts and not birth, as we know that Parasara was born of a Chandala girl and Vyasa of a fisherman.<sup>29</sup> We may say that to his interpretation of Advaita Vedānta, Narayana Guru combines the famous concept of *one caste, one religion, and one God for human person*. Rather this concept was the outcome of his interpretation of Advaita. Subscribing to the Advaita philosophy of Śaṅkara, the Guru carried it to its logical conclusion. He was a social reformer, philosopher, liberator and a democratic leader who worked for the Dalits, the untouchables to emancipate them from their lowly conditions. For him acceptance of the non-duality of the individual self and the Supreme Self, naturally leads to the assertion of the non-duality of the individual selves. He therefore opposed caste system and asserted that whatever be one's religion, a person must be good. Through the life and teaching of Narayana Guru Advaita Vedānta is transformed into an applied philosophy for the poor or a dalit theology for the marginalized.<sup>30</sup>

We may say that the Guru's 'one religion' is based on the On Absolute Brahman-Ātman, the ultimate underlying reality of everything. In *Darśanamāla* Sri Narayana Guru says:

He from whom like a fig tree as from seed,  
Came out this world manifested  
He is Brahma, He is Siva and Vishnu,  
He is the ultimate, everything is he indeed.<sup>31</sup>

This verse teaches two things: On the one hand that the Supreme Brahman is the reality providing cause (*upadāna kāraṇa*) as well as

the efficient cause (*nimitta kāraṇa*) of the world and on the other, that same Supreme Reality is today diversly experienced as different deities such as Brahma, Siva and Vishnu. Nataraja Guru comments on this verse in the following way:

By this Brahma, the creator ..., as well as, Vishnu who is the Lord of the Vaishnavas and Siva who is Lord of the Saivites and the Supreme Self of the Vedantins are all treated as one and the same. Because of this reference to the three-fold Gods, it is indicated that this world originates in Him, endures in Him, and dissolves into Him once again.<sup>32</sup>

In *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* of Sri Narayana Guru we get further insights on his 'one religion' centered on this one Supreme Reality, Brahman-Ātman. Verse 1 for example says:

In and beyond the knowledge which shines  
at once within and without the knower  
is the *Karu*; to that, with the five senses withheld,  
postrate again and again with devotion and chant.<sup>33</sup>

Nitya Chaitanya Yati points out that the word *karu* here refers to the Supreme Being who is in a process of eternal becoming or continuous manifestation. From the world of multiplicity our mind should be turned again and again to this Supreme Being.<sup>34</sup> The essence of Ātman, the substance of I-consciousness continues:

'I, I,' thus, all that are spoken of,  
when carefully considered, inwardly  
are not many; that is one;  
as the receding I-identities are countless,  
in their totality the substance of  
I-consciousness continues.<sup>35</sup>

Verse 24 has the following further words to communicate:

'That man', 'this man' – thus, all that is known in this world,  
if contemplated, is the being of the one primordial Self;  
what each performs for the happiness of the Self  
should be conducive to the happiness of another.<sup>36</sup>

In the experience of the diversity of the universe, human person comprehends the unity of the Self. When a person finally establishes himself/herself as the immortal indweller of the cosmos and the custodian of his/her knowledge, he/she does not see anything as alien. In such a state he/she is not one embodied person looking upon another as a stranger, rather he/she is the Self of all and he/she recognizes it.<sup>37</sup>

The Pluralist perspective was very strong in the Guru and whatever he says on Advaita Vedānta has to be seen in the light of this pluralist perspective. The Guru's religious philosophy was, whatever may be the religion, it suffices if it makes a person better.<sup>38</sup> After establishing the Siva temple at Aruvippuram the Guru boldly displayed the following message in the premises: "This is the ideal house where all live in full fraternity, without distinction of caste or prejudice of creed".<sup>39</sup> This is the advaita way of religion for the welfare and release of all humankind. Simultaneously by Ezava Siva Narayana Guru challenges the present day Dalit theologians who also anticipate for a 'dalit God' who can understand the agony and misery of the people. Arivippuram Prathishta was a blow to the edifice of the hierarchical and totalitarian caste system as well as the social and economic inequality, which it promoted through the ages.

According to the Guru the goal of all religions is the same and religions are only guides to help one seek what is right.<sup>40</sup> He says:

If this war of religions should end, with self-control all have to learn about all religions. Thus it will become clear that, as far as basic tenets are concerned, there are no substantial differences. The religion which thus evolves is the 'one religion' that we advocate.<sup>41</sup>

### 3. Conclusion

Strangely enough, it is the Hindu reformers Swami Vivekananda and Sri Narayana Guru who are bringing together Indian Christian theological schools of Dalit and Advaita. They, through their life and

thought, demonstrated that these two contextual theologies could very well come together. Around hundred years before Christians started talking about a counter theology, they talked about a convergent theology. They demonstrated that one could simultaneously oppose caste and embrace Advaita Vedānta. In fact for eliminating caste oppression, Advaita or non-dualism is the best theological tool available to us. If the same Ātman is the Innermost Reality in all humans and in the whole of creation, all discriminations end in the realization of that truth. The same Ātman pervades, illumines and unifies all the levels and layers of the personality of all humans and the rest of creation.<sup>42</sup> That is the theological basis for justice and equality, which the Dalit theologians are invited to uphold and develop further creatively.

If that is so, a genuine question could be raised, why is it that the Christian Advaita theologians<sup>43</sup> like Brahmabandav Upadhyaya, K. Subba Rao, Carl Keller, Mark Sunder Rao, J.G. Arapura, S.J. Samartha, Raimundo Panikkar, R.V. De Smet, Swami Abhishiktananda, Bede Griffiths, Sara Grant and Vandana, in their writings do not emphasize this aspect of the inter-connection between Advaita and Dalit theologies? These Advaita theologians should be blamed that they did not take seriously the Advaita - Dalit inter-connection so obviously pointed out by Swami Vivekananda and Sri Narayana Guru. Rather they were attempting to interpret Trinity, Christology, Creation as well as Sin and Salvation in terms of Advaita. Therefore the challenge before the Advaita theologians today is to further uphold and develop creatively the inter-connection that is there between Dalit-Advaita theologies.

### Notes

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2. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. VII, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1969, pp. 246-47.
3. Ibid., p. 162.
4. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1971, p. 304-306.

5. Ibid., p. 312. Cf. pp. 321ff.
6. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. VI, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1968, p. 133.
7. *The complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. VII, p. 247. Cf. *Ramakrishna Mission Relief Services 1968-1988*, Belur: Ramakrishna Mission, 1988.
8. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. VII, p. 247. Cf. pp. 91, 197; Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. I, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1970, pp. 364, 389-90.
9. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. III, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1970, p. 430.
10. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. I, pp. 384-85; Vol. III, p. 425; Vol. II, pp. 414-15.
11. Sami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. VIII, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1971, p. 199.
12. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. I, pp. 423-27, 436; Vol. VIII, pp. 166-67. Sri Ramakrishna prayed: "Oh my Mother, make me the servant of the Pariah". Cf. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol IV, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1972, p. 175
13. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. V. p. 311.
14. Ibid., p. 147.
15. Ibid., pp. 376-87; *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. III, pp. 197, 293, 296; Vol. IV, p. 449.
16. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. III, pp. 245-47.
17. *The Complete Works of swami Vivekananda*, Vol. I, p. 423. For Swami Vivekananda's view on caste Cf. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. VI, pp. 115, 210, 253-55, 266, 288, 319-20, 381, 393, 394; Vol. III, pp. 194, 211, 224, 266, 294-95; Vol. IV, pp. 300, 372, 468ff, 480, 484; Vol. II, p. 516; Vol. VII, pp. 149, 326-28, 484.
18. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. VI, p. 327
19. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. VII, p. 246.
20. K.P. Aleaz, *Harmony of Religions. The Relevance of Swami Vivekananda*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1993, pp. 222-23, 242.
21. Ibid., pp.223, 242.
22. K.P. Aleaz, *Religions in Christian Theology*, Kolkata: Punthi Pustak, 2001, pp. 51-64.
23. Narayana Guru, *Jāti Nirṇayam*, 11th ed. (Sri Narayana Guru Deva Kirtikal), Varkala, 1983, p. 132. Cf. Narayana Guru, *Jāti-Mīmāṃsā*, trans. by Nataraja Guru in *The Life and Teachings of Narayana Guru*. Varkala: East-West University Publication, 1990.
24. Nataraja Guru, *Ātmopadeśa Śatakam* (of Narayana Guru), Varkala: Gurukula Publishing House. 1969, p. 544.
25. K. Sreenivasan, *Sree Narayana Guru*, Trivandrum: Jayashree Publications, 1989, p. 35.
26. M.K. Sanu, *Narayana Guru. A Biography* (trns. By Madhavan Ayyappath), Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1978, pp. 165-66.

27. Nataraja Guru, *The Life and Teachings of Narayana Guru*, Op. Cit., p. 283.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 286.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 287.
30. K.P. Aleaz, *Dimensions of Indian Religion*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1995, pp. 195-96. Cf. George Jacob, *Religious Life of the Ilavas of Kerala. Change and Continuity*, Delhi: ISPCK, 1995, p.55.
31. Narayana Guru, *Darsana Mala*, trans. By Nataraja Guru, *An Integral Science of the Absolute: A Commentary on Darsna Mala* Varkala: East-West University, 1969, p.184.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Nitya Chaitanya Yati, *Neither This Nor That But ... Aum. One Hundred Meditations based on Narayana Guru's Atmopadesa Satakam*, New Delhi: D. K. Printworld (P) Ltd., 1995, p. 1.
34. *Ibid.*
35. Cf. Verse 11 in *Ibid.*, p. 23.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 50. Cf. pp. 120-21; 139-41.
38. R. Karunakaran, *Darśana Mālā of Sree Narayana Guru*, Varkala: Sri Narayana Dharma Sangham, 1983, p.5.
39. G. Priyadarsan (ed.), *SNDP Yogam Platinum Jubilee Souvenir*, Quilon: Jubilee Celebration Committee, 1978, p. 15.
40. K. Sreenivasan, *Sree Narayana Guru*, Op. Cit., p. 130.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 132.
42. Cf. K. P. Aleaz, *The Relevance of Relation in Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta*, Delhi: Kant Publications, 1996.
43. For a study of the thought of these theologians Cf. K. P. Aleaz, *Christian Thought Through Advaita Vedānta*, Delhi: ISPCK, 1996.

## IX

# ADVAITA VEDĀNTA AND INTEGRAL LIBERATION

**T**he first section of this chapter provides an introduction to Advaita Vedānta. Liberation according to Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta as integral relation between Brahman/Ātman and Creation, which includes human person, is the focus of discussion in the second section. The third and final section indicates the findings of the paper.

### 1. An Introduction to Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta

For many Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta represents the culmination of the Hindu thought. A systematic exposition of the Upaniṣads, the end portion of the Śruti, Scripture, we get in it. Śaṅkara (788-820 C.E) has commented on the nine principal Upaniṣads, Brahma Sūtra and Bhagavad Gītā. He wrote an independent work called Upadeśasahasrī as well. Vedānta represents a religion of integral experience, as opposed to the Brahmanic ritualism of the Mīmāṃsā school. But these two rival schools of Hindu philosophy have something in common as opposed to the other four Orthodox schools namely Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṅkhya, and Yoga, i.e., both are centralized on the Scripture. The particular portions of the Scripture focused are of course different, the Mīmāṃsā opting for the Brāhmaṇas.<sup>1</sup>

Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta is the most misunderstood system of thought. Some of the misunderstandings prevalent are that it teaches the world is an illusion and human person is God. We arrive at such misrepresentations because we fail to take note of Śaṅkara's method of interpretation based on the theory of implication (*lakṣaṇā*), the hermeneutical principle he employs in his writings. He also determined which passages of the Śruti were primary and which were secondary. For him the primary passages of the Śruti are the few Upaniṣadic passages which he recognized as Vedānta Statements or *mahāvākyas* and it is on the basis of these he built up his Advaita Vedānta.<sup>2</sup>

In Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta, Brahman is the non-dual (*A-dvaita*) Absolute. Advaita is neither monism nor pantheism. But it is strictly the denial of dualism (*A-dvaita*). It rejects the plurality of ultimate parallel absolutes as in Sāṅkhya. It affirms the singularity of the Absolute (Brahman/Ātman) which alone is Being (*Sat*) in the supreme sense of the term (*paramārthataḥ*). The Sat or Brahman is *akhaṇḍa*, *nirguṇa*, *atīndria* (beyond distinction, quality, and sense-perception) etc. Therefore, he/she cannot be expressed by the primary meaning (*mukhyārtha*) of words but only indicated (*lakṣita*) by the secondary meaning (*lakṣyārtha*) of the terms of such Upaniṣadic definitions as 'satyam jñānam anantam Brahma'. All depends on that Brahman for their existence, orderly experience and activity (*bhokṭṛva*, *kartṛva*) and for reaching he/she as their goal and end. No other being can exist independently of that Brahman (*tadvyatireka*). He/she is their internal (*upādāna*) Cause and Supreme Ātman (*Paramātmā*).<sup>3</sup>

Coming to the doctrine of human person according to Śaṅkara, we must note the fact that he did not develop an anthropology as he developed a doctrine of the Godhead. Here it is our task to make explicit what is implicit in Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta as the doctrine of human person. A person is a *jīvātman* (individual soul) plus inner senses, outer senses and body conjoined. *Jīvātman* is a reflection (*ābhāsa*) of the Supreme Ātman in the mirror-like ego-sense. Its

prototype is the Supreme Ātman. It can find its truth not in itself but only in its prototype which is its true *vastu*. In this sense it is not *svārtha* but *parārtha*. It is unequal to its cause and prototype. Still it is not an illusion but an ontologically relative and dependent contingent entity. Though similar to the Supreme Ātman in imitated centrality, consciousness, freedom etc., a *jīvātman* also shares in its reflector's finiteness, mobility, etc. The Paramātman imparts its lustre to the body and organs including the intellect, etc. through its *ābhāsa*, the *jīvātman*. The existential unity of a person derives absolutely from the innermost Ātman through the mediation of its reflection, the individual ātman, which diffuses it into the *buddhi* (intellect), *manas* (mind), *indriyas* (senses), and *sarīra* (body). Human person thus in Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta is an integrated contingent being totally dependent on the Absolute.<sup>4</sup>

Regarding Creation Śaṅkara would say that Brahman created the entire universe in due order without the help of any substance other than himself/herself. As a result, the whole universe is Brahman alone. The reality of the universe is totally from Brahman. If we consider the universe as something other than Brahman, it is such a conception which is ignorance (*avidyā*). The world originates, lives and is absorbed in Brahman. At all three points of time the world remains in Brahman, undifferentiated from him/her; it is never perceived apart from Brahman. Creation is the effect (*kārya*), extrinsic denominator (*upādhi*) and name and form (*nāma rūpa*) of Brahman.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. Liberation as Integral Relation

According to Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta there is an integral relation existing between Brahman/Ātman and Creation which includes individual beings. Śaṅkara has expounded the depth and beauty of this relation.

### a) An Indication of the Depth and Beauty of the Relation

It is Brahman himself/herself who assumes the different names and forms. He/she assumes the names and forms of the Lord (*īśvara*),

Inner Ruler (Antaryāmin), Hiraṇyagarbha, Virāt or Prajāpati, the elemental deities etc. Similarly he/she gets the respective names and forms as conditioned by the divergent bodies ranging from that of Brahma to that of a clump of grass (*brahmādistanība-paryanteṣu tattannāmarūpalabho brahmaṇaḥ*)<sup>6</sup> Brahman created the entire universe in due order (*anupādayaiva*) without the help of any substance other than himself/herself. And consequently, the whole universe is Brahman alone. If we consider the universe as something other than Brahman, it is such a conception, which is ignorance (*abrahmapratyayaḥ sarvoavidyāmātraḥ*). At all three points of time, the world remains in Brahman, undifferentiated from him/her (*evam brahmātmataya triṣu kaleṣu aviśiṣṭam*); it is never perceived apart from Brahman (*tadvyatirekeṇa agrahaṇāt*). The world originates, lives and is absorbed in Brahman.<sup>7</sup>

For Śaṅkara in their particular forms though things are unreal (*ākāra viśeṣāto anṛtam*), they are real in the form of pure Being (*sanmātrarūpatayā satyam*). What Śaṅkara asserts is that it is Being himself/herself (*sateva*) who is perceived in a form other than his/her own, through duality and diversity and there is no non-existence (*nasatvam*) of anything, anywhere. Whatever there is in the form of name or named (*sarvam abhidhānam abhidhīyate ca*)- which is thought to be something different- all this is Being only (*sadeva*).<sup>8</sup> There is no such entity called Jīva, different from the Supreme Self (*na jīvo nama kascitparasmadanyo vidyate*) who can be distinguished from Being (*Sat*) like a drop of water from a mass of water; Śaṅkara has shown more than once that Being himself/herself comes to be called indirectly a Jīva because of the contact with extrinsic denominators (*sadeva tupaḍhisamparkajjīva*).<sup>9</sup> Jīva is real in so far as he/she is of the nature of Being (*sadātmanā satyatvabhyaupagamāt*). All modifications which are name and form are real by the Ātman who is real and left to themselves they are unreal (*sarvaṁ ca nāmarūpadi sadātmanaiva satyam vikārajātam, svatastvanṛta-meva*)<sup>10</sup>

The wonderful relation that exists between Brahman/Ātman and humans as well as the rest of creation is further clarified when we study Śaṅkara's notion of pervasion, illumination and unification of everybody and everything effected by the Ātman as Pure Consciousness and Witness. The Ātman as invariable Pure Consciousness and unchanging Witness is the principle running through everything and abiding through all the three periods of time. The Ātman is the principle abiding through the whole of history. The Ātman is the principle running through everybody and everything of this universe. The Ātman pervades, illumines and unifies human personality. The Ātman pervades, illumines and unifies the whole world. The Ātman pervades, illumines and unifies history in its totality. Consequently history becomes important: the affairs of this world become significant; and above all human life on earth becomes purposive and meaningful.

*b) Ātman as Pure Consciousness and Witness*

Śaṅkara points out that the Ātman should be realized in one form only, i.e., as homogeneous Pure Consciousness (*viññāṇaghanaikarasaprakāreṇa*), without any break in him/her, like the space (*ākāśavannirāṇṇareṇa*). Consciousness (*viññāṇam*) is Brahman's own form (*svarūpa*) just as the light of the sun is from the sun or the heat of fire is from fire. Consciousness is invariable (*caitanyasyavyabhicāritvaṁ*). Pervaded by Consciousness and objectively illumined by the Consciousness that is the Ātman, mental modifications in the form of objects come into existence.<sup>11</sup>

Brahman being eternal Consciousness (*nityaviññāptisvarūpatvāt*) is the Witness of all (*sarvasākṣiḥ*). The vision of the Witness can never be lost; the vision of the Witness like the sun etc., revealing things through their natural constant light (*svabhāvenaiva nityena prakāśena*). The vision itself is the Ātman's own form (*svarūpa*). Śaṅkara emphasizes the point that unless there be some principle running through everything and abiding through all the three periods of time or some unchanging Witness of all, there can be no human

dealing involving remembrance, recognition, etc. which are contingent on past impressions that are stored up in conformity with environment, time and causation. The Ātman as Witness pervades sight, hearing, thought and knowledge. The ordinary vision originates and ends pervaded by the eternal vision of the Ātman (*tasya vyāptaiva jāyate tatha vinasyati ca*). We cannot see, hear, think about and know the eternal Witness, hearer, thinker, and knower who pervades (*vyāptāram*) our ordinary sight, hearing, thought (*manovṛtteḥ*) and knowledge (*buddhivṛtteḥ*).<sup>12</sup>

### c) Pervasion of the Ātman

Śaṅkara points out that Brahman/Ātman pervades the whole creation and the totality of human personality. Brahman is omniscient by virtue of being the director of the organs of all creatures (*sarvabhutakaraṇaprayoktṛtvāt*) and the elements have activity only when they are presided over (*sadhyakṣānameva*) by the Supreme Lord; they perform their activities through the pervasive presence of the Supreme Lord (*parmeśvarāveśavaśādeva*).<sup>13</sup> The effect is pervaded and held together by its cause and the Supreme Cause, the Brahman/Ātman pervades and holds together everything, though at the same time totally different from all his/her effects. Śaṅkara confirms the regressive analysis of the Upaniṣads, according to which there is an ascending gradation of pervasiveness from grossness to subtleness, from the gross senses to Puruṣa who is the culmination of subtleness, greatness and inner Selfhood through the intermediary stages of subtle elements, mind, intellect, Hiraṇyagarbha and the Unmanifest.<sup>14</sup>

The five sheaths (*pañcakośaḥ*) are physical, vital, mental, intelligent and blissful and the Ātman is implanted (*mayāḥ*) in each of them as well as innermost to all of them. As the Ātman permeates each of these sheaths they are called physical (*annamayāḥ*), vital (*prāṇamayāḥ*), mental (*manomayāḥ*), intelligent (*vijñānamayāḥ*) and blissful (*ānandamayāḥ*) self. The self (*ātmā*) implanted in vital force is within and different from the self implanted in food; within that is

the self implanted in mind and the self implanted in intellect (*tadantarmānamayo vijñāna mayah*) and thus by stages the self has been made to enter into the cavity of the intellect (*itivijanaguhāyām praveśitah*). And there, again, has been presented a distinct self that is implanted in bliss, one has to realize within this very cavity of the heart through knowledge that self which is Brahman as the culmination of the growth of bliss. All the five selves which are made up of the elements beginning with space (*ākāśādibhūtrabdhaiḥ*) that are the creation of ignorance (*avidyākṛtaiḥ*) successively pervades the preceding one (*pūrvapūrvavyāpibhiruttarottaraiḥ*) and the Ātman pervades all (*sarvagataḥ*).<sup>15</sup>

The self constituted by the essence of food (*annarasamayaḥ*) has a human shape (*puruṣavidhatvam*) and hence the succeeding selves also become humanly shaped.<sup>16</sup> The vital force (*prāṇaḥ*) is the life of all and the food-self is filled with it just as bellows are filled with air (*vayunevadṛtiḥ*) and similarly the earlier selves are filled up by the succeeding ones (*pūrvaḥ pūrvascottarottarena pūrṇaḥ*).<sup>17</sup> The mental-self consists of the Vedas (*manomayo vedatamoktaḥ*) and the intelligence-self represents the well-ascertained knowledge (*niscayavijñānaiḥ*) regarding them.<sup>18</sup> The intellect is pervaded by the reflection of Pure Consciousness that is Ātman and it causes the knowledge of Brahman due to its nearness to Brahman.<sup>19</sup> The bliss-self acts as a pointer (*liṅgaḥ*) to the Supreme Ātman, though it belongs to the category of the conditioned selves.<sup>20</sup>

#### d) Illumination of the Ātman

Śaṅkara points out that as an emerald or any other gem (*marakatādirmaṇiḥ*) dropped for testing into milk etc. impart its lustre to them (*atmacchayameva tatksirādidravayam karoti*), so the luminous Ātman (*ātmajyotiḥ*) unifies and integrates (*ekīkṛtya*) the intellect and all other organs within the body (*karyakaraṇa-samghāṭanī*) and imparts his/her luster to them (*ātmajyotischāyam karoti*). It is always through the grace of the light of the Ātman that

all our activities take place (*ātmajyotiranugraheṇaiva hi sarvadā sarvaḥ samvyavahārah*).<sup>21</sup> The Supreme Ātman (*paramātmā*) is one and illumines (*prākāśayati*) all bodies, the whole material being (*kṣetram*) from the Unmanifest down to the unmoving objects. The light of Consciousness (*caitanyaḥ*) exists in all alike, in the moving and unmoving objects, directly proportional to the *sattva* principle they possess.<sup>22</sup>

The Supreme Lord (*Prameśvaraḥ*) is the self-effulgent Ātman (*svayamjyotirātmaivaḥ*) and self-effulgence means being Pure Consciousness (*svayam jyotistvam nāma caitanyātmāsvabhāvata*). The manifestation noticed in the case of all these names, forms, actions and results (*nāmarūpakṛiyākāra kaphalajātasya*) is caused by the existence of the light of Brahman (*brahmajyotiḥ sattānimitta*). The light of Brahman is implied (*avagamyate*) by the light seen in things born from him/her. Through the various kinds of effulgence in the effects, it is known that luminosity is intrinsic to Brahman (*kāryagatena vividhena bhāsātasya brahmaṇo bharūpatvam svatoavagamyate*). All those which shine- the sun, moon, stars, lightning, fire etc. – shine according as the Supreme Lord shines (*parameśvaram dīpyamāṇam sarvam anudīpyate*).<sup>23</sup>

Whatever is perceived, is perceived through the light that is Brahman (*brahmaṇaiva jyotiḥopalabhyate*); but, Brahman is not perceived through any other light, he/she being by nature self-effulgent (*svayam jyotiḥ svarūpatvāt*). Brahman reveals all others, but Brahman is not revealed by them (*brahma hyanydvacanakti na tu brahmānyena vyajyate*). Since the Ātman, indeed constitutes the essence of everything, the internal organ cannot act with regard to its own Ātman (*sarvaviśayam prati pratyageveti svātmāni na pravartate antaḥkaraṇam*); the mind can think only when it is illumined by the light of Consciousness within (*amtasthena hi caitanyajyotisāvabhasitasya manaso mananasāmārthyam*)<sup>24</sup> The Ātman is the Ear of the ear (*śrotrasya śrotram*), the Mind of mind (*manasomanaḥ*).

the Speech of speech (*vaco vacam*), the Life of life (*prāṇasya prāṇaḥ*) and the Eye of the eye (*cakṣuṣṣcākṣuḥ*), because all these organs can perform their functions only through the radiance of the light of Consciousness (*caitanya jyotiṣa dīpitam*).<sup>25</sup>

#### e) The Unification of the Ātman

In the view of Śaṅkara the Ātman unifies everything by identifying with everything. The Ātman is the common referent of the universe (*ātmāsamānyatva*), its origin, and its end. Just as a drum, a cunch, and a vīṇa have distinct sounds, general and particular notes of their own, which are included in sound in general, so during the continuance of the universe we may know all things to be unified in Brahman, because the varieties of genus and particulars are not different from it.<sup>26</sup> The Ātman cannot be taken apart from anything else (*kutascitpravibhajya*) like a stalk of grass from its sheath, and show in his/her self-effulgent form (*jyotirūpaḥ*). The Ātman, illuminating the intellect, illumines through it the entire body and organs (*kṣetramavabhāsayati*) and therefore through the similarity of the intellect (*buddhisamānyadvāreṇa*), the Ātman assumes the likeness of everything (*tena sarveṇa samānaḥ*).<sup>27</sup> As each particular organ functions the Ātman is internally present to it.<sup>28</sup> The vital force and the organs are merely the Ātman's names according to functions (*karmajani nāmāni*) and they are unified in the Ātman or become non-different (*ekamabhinnatam bhavanti*) from the unconditioned (*nirupādhike*) Ātman only as his/her own essence (*vastumātrarūpeṇa hi*).<sup>29</sup>

Brahman unifies everything in his/her homogeneity (*ekarasata*). The whole creation is never unreal with regard to one's own Ātman (*nānṛtatvam teṣāṃ kadācidapi svatmani bhavati*). The whole creation is real as Ātman's essence: it is real in his/her homogeneity and this is how it is unified in him/her. It is this knowledge of the homogeneity of everything as Brahman that constitutes the realization of the unity of the Ātman (*ātmaikatvadrśanātmikam*).<sup>30</sup>

*f) Integral Liberation, an Ever Attained Fact*

Śaṅkara points out that liberation comes from true knowledge (*samyagjñānamokṣaḥ*). Our vision of the Ātman of all (*sarvātmavam*) occurs simultaneously with the rise of complete illumination (*samyagdarśanakalameva*) and it is a matter of immediate direct result (*pratyakṣaphalatvāt*), the result of knowledge being a matter of direct experience (*anubhavārūḍham tu jñānaphalam*). Liberation (*kaivalyam*) comes inevitably to a person of knowledge (*vidūṣaḥ*); there can be no fear of non-acquisition of it (*phalavirahasamk- anupapattiḥ*). With regard to heaven coming long after, there may be such a fear as to whether it will come or not, but liberation is not like that, it being a matter of direct experience.<sup>31</sup>

Liberation is an ever-attained fact. The Supreme Brahman can never become a goal to be attained (*gantavyata*) by us humans as he/she pervades everything (*sarvagatatvam*), is inside everything (*sarvāntaram*), is the Ātman of all (*sarvātmakam*); one cannot reach where one already is (*nahi gatameva gamyate*). Liberation cannot be a product of anything, it being realized through knowledge (*vidyāyadhigamyata*) as a fact eternally present in its own right (*nityasiddhasvabhāvameva*). Liberation can be considered as a fruit merely from the point of view of the cessation of bondage, and not from the standpoint of production of any fresh result. Liberation is not a change of one state into another, as such a conception makes liberation artificial and therefore transitory. Liberation is not a union with Brahman or a separation from matter (*samyogo viyogaḥ*); both union and separation being transitory (*anitya*), liberation cannot consist of the individual being going to Brahman or of Brahman coming to him/her (*gamanagamane*). Liberation is the affirmation of one's own real nature namely the Ātman, which is uncaused and indestructible, which is beyond acceptance or rejection. Because the Ātman is the Ātman of all (*ātmavādeva ca sarveṣām*) he/she is beyond all rejection and acceptance.<sup>32</sup>

Knowledge of Brahman (*jñānam*) only means the cessation of the consideration of things which are not ultimate as one's own Ātman (*aparātmabhāvanivṛttireva*). When the identification of other things as Ātman is destroyed (*anyātmabhāvanivṛttau*) the experience of the Ātman as one's own Ātman which is natural alone will remain (*ātmabhāvaḥ svātmāni svābhaviko yaḥ sa kevalo bhavati*). Just because the Ātman is our own Ātman (*ātma ca naḥ ātmatvādeva*) he/she cannot be produced, attained, modified or improved (*notpadya apyo vikāryaḥ samskaryo va*) by any means (*kenacitsadhanena*). The attainment of the Ātman (*ātmalābha*) by a person of knowledge (*viduṣu*) means the Ātman reveals (*prakāśayati*) his/her own nature in its proper form (*svātmātatvam avarūpam*) which was enveloped in ignorance (*avidyāsamchannam*). When knowledge dawns the Ātman becomes revealed just like pots etc., on the coming of light.<sup>33</sup>

*g) Equality of all Humans in the realm of Knowledge and Liberation*

In Śaṅkara's system of thought, there is promise of equality of all humans in the realm of knowledge and liberation. He very clearly states in Upadeśasāhasrī that caste distinctions last only so long as ignorance lasts. "Duties belonging to particular caste etc. come to an end when right knowledge is achieved (*vātha jñānasya sanīprāptau tadjjātyādikarmaṇām*)".<sup>34</sup> The Ātman is "beyond hunger and thirst, free from such differentiations as Brahmana, Ksatriya, etc., and is not subject to birth and death".<sup>35</sup> He further exhorts "to give up all connections with caste etc. (*hitvājātyādi*)".<sup>36</sup> There is no distinction of superiority or inferiority of individuals in the state of realization of Brahman:

Among people gaining entry into the royal palace, there is always a distinction made on the ground of their being more or less intimate with the king; there is no such distinction of being more or less intimate among persons entering the Supreme Brahman (*na parasya brahmaṇoantaraṅgabahirāṅgātaviśeṣaḥ*) ... There is no superiority or inferiority in the immortality attained (*na nyūnatā nāpyadhikatāmṛtatva*).<sup>37</sup>

### 3. Conclusion

Advaita Vedanta becomes relevant for us today as it presents an integral relation between Brahman/Ātman and the Creation which includes humans, as the meaning of liberation. Our reality is totally derived from Brahman/Ātman; apart from him/her we have no existence. Brahman/Ātman pervades, illumines and unifies all the levels and layers of our personality and the experience of this is liberation. In fact this pervasion, illumination and unification is an ever accomplished fact. We are already liberated. The only thing needed from our side is to become aware of it. That awareness is our total transformation.

#### Notes

1. Cf. S. C. Chatterjee and D. M. Datta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, Seventh Edition, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1968.
2. K. P. Aleaz, *The Relevance of Relation in Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta*, Delhi: Kant Publications, 1996, pp. 25-26, 36.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 27, 37-45, 166-216
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28, 45-49, 143-165
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 49-73, 74-143
6. Śaṅkara, *Aitareya Upaniṣad Bhāṣya* (Ai. U. B.), 3. 1. 3
7. Ai. U. B., 2. 1. 1. : Śaṅkara, *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad Bhāṣya* (Mu. U. B.), 2. 2. 11. ; Śaṅkara, *Chāndogya Upaniṣad Bhāṣya* (C. U. B.), 3. 14. 1.
8. C. U. B., 8. 5. 4. ; 6. 2. 2.
9. Śaṅkara, *Brahmasūtra Bhāṣya* (B. S. B.), 3. 2. 9.
10. C. U. B., 6. 3. 2.
11. Śaṅkara, *Kaṭha Upaniṣad Bhāṣya*, (Ka. U. B.) 1. 3. 15. ; 2. 1. 3. ; Śaṅkara, *Taittirīya Upaniṣad Bhāṣya* (Ta. U. B.) 2. 1. 1. ; Śaṅkara, *Praśna Upaniṣad Bhāṣya* (Pr. U. B.), 6. 2. ; Śaṅkara, *Updeśasāhasrī* (U. S.), 18. 118. ; B. S. B. 2. 3. 29. ; 2. 3. 18.
12. B. S. B., Introduction; 2. 2. 31. ; U. S., 7.2. ; 18. 84 ; 16. 15 ; 13. 6-8 ; 7. 3. ; 11. 3-4 ; 18. 205 ; Mu. U. B., 2. 2. 10; Ai. U. B., 3. 1. 1 ; 2. 1. Introduction. ; Śaṅkara, *Bṛahadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad Bhāṣya* (Br. U. B.), 1. 4. 10. ; 4. 3. 23. ; 3. 4. 2. Pr. U. B., 6. 5.
13. Ke. U. B., 3. 2. ; Br. U. B., 3. 6. 1. ; B. S. B., 2. 3. 13; 3. 2. 37; C. U. B., 3. 12. 9. ; 3. 14. 2. ; 3. 14. 3.

14. *Br. U.B.* , 3. 6. 1. ; *Ka. U.B.*, 1. 3. 10-11. ; 2. 3. 6-8.
15. *Ta. U.B.*, 2. 2. 1. ; 2. 6. 1. ; 2. 8. 5. ; 2. 3. 1.
16. *Ta. U.B.*, 2. 2. 1.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ta. U.B.* , 2. 4. 1. ; 2. 3. 1.
19. *U.S.* , 12. 1. ; *Ta. U.B.*, 2. 6. 1. ; 2. 5. 1. ; *B. S. B.*, 2. 3. 30. ; *Br. U. B.*, 4. 3. 7.
20. *Ta. U.B.*, 2. 5. 1. ; 2. 6. 1.
21. *Br. U.B.*, 4. 3. 7. : *Ai. U.B.*, 2. 1. 2. ; Śaṅkara, *Bhagavad Gītā Bhāṣya*, (*B.G.B.*), 13. 33. ; 13. 5. ; 13. 6. ; 15. 12-15. ; *Ka. U.B.* , 2. 2. 13; 2. 2. 15.
22. *B.G.B.*, 13. 33. ; 13. 5. ; 13. 6. ; 15. 12. ; 15. 13.
23. *Ka. U.B.* , 2. 3. 1. ; 2. 2. 15. ; 2. 2. 13. ; *Br. U.B.*, 4. 4. 22. ; 4. 3. 22. ; *U.S.* , 17. 55. ; 17. 56. ; 15. 28. ; 15. 34. ; 19. 25. ; 7. 4. ; *B. S. B.*, 1. 3. 22. ; *B.G. B.*, 13. 14.
24. *B. S. B.*, 1. 3. 22. ; 1. 1. 24. ; 1. 1. 5. ; *U. S.* , 15. 26. ; 9. 6. ; 14. 7. ; 17. 54. ; 15. 27. ; 16. 5-6. ; *Ke. U. B.* , 1. 6.
25. *Ke. U.B.*, 1. 2.
26. *Br. U.B.* , 2. 4. 11. ; 2. 5. 1. ; 2. 4. 9.
27. *Br. U.B.* , 4. 3. 7.
28. *Br. U.B.* , 4. 4. 5.
29. *Br. U.B.* , 1. 4. 7.
30. *B. S. B.* , 1. 3. 1. ; 2. 3. 53. ; *Br. U. B.* , 2. 4. 5. ; 5. 1. 1. ; *C. U. B.* , 8. 5. 4. ; Śaṅkara. *Iṣa Upaniṣad Bhāṣya*, Introduction.
31. *B.S.B.* , 3. 4. 52. ; 2. 1. 11. ; 3. 3. 32.
32. *B.S.B.* , 4. 3. 14. ; 3. 4. 52. ; 4. 4. 2. ; 1. 1. 4. ; *U.S.* , 16. 39.-41. ; 18. 202-203. : *C.U.B.* , 8. 4. 1. ; *Ka. U.B.* , 2. 3. 1.
33. *Br. U.B.* , 4. 4. 20. ; 4. 4. 22. ; *Mu. U. B.* , 3. 2. 3.
34. *U.S.* , 17. 44. , 45. , 47.
35. *B.S.B.* , Introduction.
36. *U.S.* , 17. 76.
37. *C.U.B.* , 1. 4. 5.

## X

# **BREAKING THE BOUNDARIES: INDIAN CHRISTIAN LIVING IN THE MIDST OF PEOPLE OF OTHER FAITHS**

Indian Christians living in the midst of people of other faiths had opportunities in the past to break the boundaries that separated them from others. This chapter is an attempt to highlight this glorious and creative past. Highlights from the past are presented in order to imbibe inspiration for the future course of theological praxis. The first section indicates some early developments among Indian Christians in conceiving a contextual ecclesiology. Some initiatives undertaken by the World Council of Churches for a positive inter-religious relation are identified in the second section. The third section demonstrates the fact that Indian Christians have received new creative meanings on Jesus through the help of Vedāntic- Neo-Vedāntic thought. In the fourth and final section, our concluding observations are presented in order to evolve a viable theological praxis for today and the coming days.

### **1. Some Early Developments in India**

In the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> c. there were attempts in Calcutta, Tinnevely and Madras to create united indigenous churches<sup>1</sup> and these attempts though did not succeed, influenced the thinking of Indian Christians with respect to their attitude to Indian culture and religion

resulting in efforts to develop Indian Christian theology.<sup>2</sup> Kali Charan Banerjea and Joy Govinda Shome left their Churches in 1887 to form *The Calcutta Christo Samaj*. Its purpose was to gather all Indian Christians within it under the confession of the Apostolic Creed. The Samaj emphasized indigenisation in worship and theology.<sup>3</sup> Prior to this in 1868 a number of educated Indian Christians under the influence and leadership of Lal Behari Day and Krishna Mohun Banerjea had already formed *The Bengal Christian Association* for the promotion of Christian Truth and Godliness and the protection of the rights of Indian Christians.<sup>4</sup> Before this Lal Behari Day had already brought forward a proposal for a *National Church of Bengal* which should give great freedom in matters of ministry and liturgy, uniting all Christians under the Apostolic Creed.<sup>5</sup>

In 1858 in Tinnevely a group of Nadar Christians broke away from the Church Missionary Society to form *The Hindu Church of the Lord Jesus* and they tried to indigenize their Church removing everything, which appeared to them to be European.<sup>6</sup> In 1886 *The National Church of Madras* was founded under the leadership of S. Parani Andi. The aim was to gather all Indian Christians into one self-supporting and self-governing Church with the New Testament as the sole guide in matters of faith. They used Tamil lyrics for worship and conceived Jesus as an Asiatic.

## 2. The World Council of Churches' Initiatives

Since the meeting of the Central Committee at Adis Ababa in 1971, dialogue with people of living faiths has been part of the work of the World Council of Churches, it being understood as the common adventure of the churches. The consultation held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in 1977 on the theme 'Dialogue in Community' proved to be a significant stage in the very conception of dialogue. Dialogue in community has meant entering into dialogue with our neighbours of other faiths in the communities we as Christians share with them, exploring such issues as peace, justice, and humanity's relation to

nature. *The Guidelines on Dialogue* adopted at the Central Committee meeting at Kingston, Jamaica, in 1979 since then, has served as a guiding document for all churches. It has pointed out the relationship between Christian witness and dialogue. To quote:

In giving their witness, they (Christians) recognize that in most circumstances today the spirit of dialogue is necessary. For this reason we do not see dialogue and the giving of witness as standing in any contradiction to one another. Indeed, as Christians enter dialogue with their commitment to Jesus Christ, time and again the relationship of dialogue gives opportunity for authentic witness. Thus, to the member churches of the WCC we feel able with integrity to commend the way of dialogue as one in which Jesus Christ can be confessed in the world today; at the same time we feel able with integrity to assure our partners in dialogue that we come not as manipulators but as genuine fellow pilgrims, to speak with them of what we believe God to have done in Jesus Christ who has gone before us, but whom we seek to meet anew in dialogue.

Dialogue has been defined in the document as “witnessing to our deepest convictions and listening to those of our neighbours”.<sup>9</sup>

Dialogue with people of other living faiths leads us to ask questions on Christian Theology of Religions. How do Christians theologically account for the diversity of the world’s religious quest and commitment? What is the relation of the diversity of religious traditions to the mystery of the one Triune God? At both the Nairobi (1975) and Vancouver (1983) assemblies of the WCC, dialogue became a controversial point primarily because of the implicit assumptions made in dialogue about the theological significance of other faiths. At Vancouver, for example, a major stream within the Assembly rejected the possibility of God’s presence and activity in the religious life of people of other faiths. Consequently the then Dialogue sub-unit of the WCC undertook a four-year study programme on ‘My Neighbour’s Faith and Mine – Theological Discoveries through Interfaith Dialogue’.<sup>10</sup> As the apex of this study a document has been brought

out by WCC through a significant ecumenical consultation in Baar, Switzerland in 1990. The Baar Statement says:

We need to respect their religious convictions (i.e., of people of other living Faiths), different as these may be from our own, and to admire the things which God has accomplished and continues to accomplish in them through the Spirit. Inter-religious dialogue is therefore a “two-way street”. Christians must enter into it in a spirit of openness prepared to receive from others, while on their part, they give witness of their own faith. Authentic dialogue opens both partners to a deeper conversion to the God who speaks to each through the other. Through the witness of others, we Christians can truly discover facets of the divine mystery which we have not yet seen or responded to. The practice of dialogue will thus result in the deepening of our own life of faith. We believe that walking together with people of other Living faiths will bring us to a fuller understanding and experience of truth.<sup>11</sup>

### **3. Indian Christians can Receive New Meanings on Jesus in terms of Other Faith Experiences.**

Other faith experiences challenge us with new insights regarding the very content of Christian thought. For example, the Neo-Vedāntic interpretations on the person and work of Christ as well as the Indian Christian interpretations of Christ in terms of Advaita Vedānta, opens up new creative insights for Indian Christians and they are consequently enabled to cross over the boundaries of traditional Christian theology.

#### *a) The Neo-Vedāntic Christologies.*

We can identify a development in the conception of the person of Christ in Neo-Vedānta. The later Neo-Vedāntins Swamis Akhilananda, Prabhavananda, and Ranganathananda are more emphatic on the role of Jesus as an Incarnation as distinguished from an individual human person. According to them, Jesus is one of the avatāras or the descents of God, born without *karmas* and above *māyā*. An avatāra has the unique power to transmit spirituality, transform human lives by touch, look or wish, and reveal divinity through transfiguration. There is an

important difference even between saints and incarnations. Whereas saints are at first bound souls who later became illumined, the incarnations are the veritable embodiments of divine light and power from the very beginning of their lives. As a divine incarnation, Jesus had much compassion and the power to redeem. Also, as an incarnation Jesus was a *yogi* of the highest type who practiced all the yogas namely *karma*, *bhakti*, *rāja* and *jñāna*. Jesus as an incarnation had constant vision of God and through *samādhi* he realized the identity and unity of the individual self with the Supreme Self.<sup>12</sup>

But, we should note that in the earlier Neo-Vedāntins like Swamis Vivekananda, Abhedananda as well as S. Radhakrishnan the emphasis is more on presenting Jesus as an ideal, perfect human person. The difference between a human person and Christ is a difference in manifestation; but as Absolute Being, there is no difference between the two. The resources of God, which were available to Jesus, are open to all and if we struggle as he did, we will develop the God in us. What Jesus does is setting an example, by showing the path of perfection. True, these earlier Neo-Vedāntins also had no problem in worshipping Jesus as Divine; as one who reveals the Absolute, as a herald of truth on earth. So, we can say that Neo-Vedāntins keep a balance between following the path shown by Christ and worshipping him. Jesus is simultaneously a Divinity for us to worship and an ideal for us to imitate.<sup>13</sup>

#### *b) Christian Advaita Vedāntic Interpretations of Christ*

There are many theologians in India who receive Advaita Vedāntic thought totally in their endeavour of constructing Christian thought. Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya interpreted Trinity as *Saccidānanda* as well as creation as *māyā*. He conceived the second person of the Trinity as *Chit* and the person of Jesus Christ in terms of Vedāntic human nature. If the knowing self is the Father, the known self or the self-begotten by Father's knowledge is the Son and *Chit* represents this meaning.<sup>14</sup> After maintaining God as absolutely different from all

appearances as in Advaita Vedānta, Carl Keller pointed out that Jesus Christ is God's appearance in the midst of appearances.<sup>15</sup> According to K. Subba Rao the Divine Guru Jesus leads us from the *ajñāna* of egoism, body and matter to the *jñāna* of the affirmation of the non-dual spirit. Human destiny is to become perfect or Christ through renunciation and Jesus' help is needed for us to reach this goal. Renunciation or love and sacrifice which Christ has taught us through his life is the same as giving up duality which is to forsake the body to find the God behind it.<sup>16</sup> J. G. Arapura emphasizes that we must raise the question of Ultimate Reality in the Vedāntic fashion and at the same time, and within that question itself ask about the meaning of Jesus Christ. The meaning of Jesus Christ and Brahman are inexhaustible and at some great depth they meet and interpenetrate and that interpenetration is much more than the so called indigenization or inculturation.<sup>17</sup> It is R.V. De Smet's opinion that Śaṅkara's conception of the *tādātmya* relation between world and Brahman can explain the relation between the human and divine natures in Christ; Christ's incarnation is a case of *vivaṇṭa*.<sup>18</sup> In S. J. Samartha's view Advaita represents a grand vision of unity that encompasses nature, humanity and God and this unitive vision of Advaita is very relevant for an Indian Christology. For him the theory of multiple *avatāras* is theologically sound in the pluralist context of India.<sup>19</sup> K. P. Aleaz expounded the person of Jesus as the extrinsic denominator (*upādhi*), the name and form (*nāmarūpa*), the effect (*kārya*) as well as the reflection (*ābhāsa*) and delimitation (*ghaṭākāśaḥ*) of Brahman. The function of Jesus was interpreted as to manifest the all-pervasive (*sarvagatatvam*), illuminative (*jyotiḥ*) and unifying (*ekīkṛtya*) power of the Supreme Atman.<sup>20</sup> Thus a Christian philosophy is emerging in relation to Advaita Vedāntic insights on major concepts such as God, Christ, human person and creation.

Indian Christians are fortunate to be acquainted with Advaita Vedāntic experience in order that it may enrich their faith-experience. Deeper dimensions of a Christian philosophy are manifesting through the aid of Śaṅkara's thought. Deeper meanings of the person and

function of Jesus are emerging from within Advaita Vedānta. Indian Christian theologians are slowly recognizing this. Of course, all of them have not yet recognized this. Still there are Indian Christian theologians who are Exclusivists and reject Advaita Vedānta. Still there are Indian Christian theologians who are Inclusivists, who try to reinterpret Advaita to suit their preformulated Christian standpoint and find the fulfillment of Advaita in Christ. But the good news is that there are many Christian who follow the approaches of either Pluralism or Pluralistic Inclusivism<sup>21</sup> and who are able to experience the fulfillment of a pre-formulated Christian theology in advaitic experience. Advaita inspires a creative Christian philosophy. The last one hundred years of the second millennium bear witness to this glorious truth.

#### 4. Conclusion

Indian Christian living in the midst of people of other faiths enables them to break the boundaries in terms of insights such as the following: a) The 19<sup>th</sup> c. Indian attempts to create united indigenous churches had the effect to have a positive attitude to Indian culture and religion resulting in efforts to develop Indian Christian theology. b) The WCC Baar statement proclaimed that through the witness of others, we Christians could truly discover facets of the divine mystery, which we have not yet seen or responded to. The practice of dialogue will thus result in the deepening of our own life of faith. c) If in the early Neo-Vedāntins the emphasis is more on presenting Jesus as an ideal, perfect human person, the later Neo-Vedāntins are more emphatic on the role of Jesus as an Incarnation as distinguished from an individual human person. According to Neo-Vedāntins we have to go beyond the atonement theories. What Jesus does is to show us the way to become perfect. to show us our true nature which is divine. d) There are many Christian theologians in India who receive Advaita Vedāntic thought totally and interpret, for example, Christ as *Chit*, as a case of *vivaṇṭa*, as representing the all-pervasive, illuminative and unificative power of the Supreme Ātman and so on, thus bringing in new creative insights regarding the person and work of Christ.

## Notes

1. K. P. Aleaz, *The Gospel of Indian Culture*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1994, pp.110-111.
2. Cf. Kaj Baago, *Pioneers of Indigenous Christianity*, Madras/Bangalore: CLS/CISRS, 1969, pp.1-11; "First Independent Movements among Indian Christians", *Indian Church History Review*, Vol. 1, No.1, June 1967, pp.65-78.
3. Kaj Baago, *Pioneers of Indigenous Christianity*, *Op. Cit.*, pp.5-7
4. *Ibid.*, pp.2-3..
5. *Ibid.*, p.2.
6. *Ibid.*, pp.1-2.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-11.
8. *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies*, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1979, p. 11.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
10. Cf. *My Neighbour's Faith-And Mine. Theological Discoveries Through Interfaith Dialogue. A Study Guide*, Delhi: ISPCK, 1988.
11. "Baar Statement", *Current Dialogue*, 18, June 1990, p. 7.
12. K.P. Aleaz, *Jesus in Neo-Vedānta. A Meeting of Hinduism and Christianity*, Delhi: Kant Publications, 1995, pp. 165-166.
13. *Ibid.*
14. B. Upadhyaya, "A Vedantic Parable", *Sophia*, Vol. V, No.8, Aug.1898, p.119; "An Exposition of Catholic Belief as compared with the Vedanta", *Sophia*, Vol. V, No.1, Jan.1898, p. 11; "Our New Canticle", *Sophia*, Vol.V, No.10, Oct.1898, p.146; "Maya", *Sophia*, Vol. 1, No.18, Oct. 17, 1900, pp. 6-7; "The True Doctrine of Maya", Vol. VI, No.2, Feb. 1899, pp.226-228; "Vedantism and Christianity", *Sophia*, Vol. I, Nos. 15&16, Sept. 29, 1900, p. 6.
15. For Carl Keller's thought Cf. "The Vedanta Philosophy and the Message of Christ", *The International Review of Missions*, Vol. 42, 1953, pp. 377-389.
16. Cf. Kalagara Subba Rao, *O Lord, Where can I get so many millstones?*, Munipalle, n. d.; *The Outpouring of My Heart (translation into English of his Telugu compositions ed. by C. D. Airan)*, Guntur: Shrimathy Parripati Gita Mahalakshmi Satyanarayana, 1964; *Three Letters. Become Christ, Don't Pray, Man Created God*, Hyderabad: Hyderabad Reception Committee, 1965; *Retreat Padre*, Second Revised Edition, Machilipatnam, 1972; *Translation of the New Songs*, Vijayawada, n. d.
17. J.G. Arapura, "The Use of Indian Philosophical Traditions in Christian Thought", *The Indian Journal of Theology*, Vol. 29, No. 2, April-June 1980, pp. 67-73; "A Philosophical approach to Christology" in *Dialogue in India. Multi-religious Perspective and Practice*, ed. by K. P. Aleaz, Calcutta: Bishop's College, 1991, pp.43-55; "Rediscovering the meaning of the Symbol" in *Indian Voices in Today's Theological Debate*, ed. by Horst Burkler and Wolfgang M. W. Roth, Lucknow etc.:LPH etc., 1972, pp.88-111.
18. R V. De Smet, "Materials for an Indian Christology", *Religion and Society*, Vol. XII, No. 4, Dec. 1965, pp.6-15.
19. S.J. Samartha, *One Christ-Many Religions. Toward a Revised Christology*, Bangalore: Sathri, 1992, pp.122-27; 142-50.

20. Cf. K.P. Aleaz, *An Indian Jesus from Śaṅkara's Thought*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1997; *Christian Thought through Advaita Vedānta*, Delhi: ISPCK, 1996; *Christian Responses to Indian Philosophy*, Kolkata: Punthi Pustak, 2005.
21. Cf. K.P. Aleaz, *Theology of Religions. Birmingham Papers and Other Essays*, Calcutta: Moumita, 1998.

PART THREE

**SOME RECENT DEVOTIONAL  
ADDRESSES AND SERMONS**

## XI

### AT THE CROSS OF JESUS, AT THE FEET OF JESUS

*(Devotional Address at the Mar Thoma Syrian Church,  
Kolkata on 19.3.2005)*

**I**t is our experience that Cross of Christ is the light that illumines the meaning of human life. Cross is the power that enables us to grapple with the mysteries of life and death. Disciples of Jesus through twenty centuries have sought to explore the meaning of the mystery of Cross. True, no exploration can exhaust its meaning. But all explorations, however feeble those attempts may have been are enriching for our spiritual growth; are enriching for our total life. We come to the Cross with humility; we come to the feet of Jesus with an attitude of self-surrender; with an attitude of faith that the cross can change us; it can transform our lives. The Cross of Christ can provide us with a new vision and meaning. In the perspective of such an attitude of faith and self-surrender, I seek the grace of God to share with you two points regarding the meaning of the Cross of Christ.

#### **1) Cross is a working principle of life to overthrow evil through the power of redemptive suffering love for all**

If Christianity made Cross a creed, God raised Mahatma Gandhi to bring the Cross back from the realm of creed and dogma and set it again as a working principle of life to overthrow evil through the power

of redemptive suffering love. Cross in action is the redemptive suffering love which identifies with the sufferings of the people, and which overthrows evils; and we are challenged by Mahatma Gandhi and his disciple S.K. George to have a redemptive suffering love for humanity for the elimination of the evils of our society. S.K. George interpreted Gandhian Satyagraha as Cross in action in India saying it has given Jesus his greatest opportunity to enter the heart of a remade India. The radical thinker S.K. George, a former student and teacher of Bishop's College had forcefully pointed out this to Metropolitan Foss Westcott as early as 1930 at the risk of his own career and today we are all proud of S.K., George. Through Gandhiji's Satyagraha Movement S.K. George participated in the Cross in action in India and that is a challenge to all of us Christians. We are challenged to take the Indian Church and her Lord Jesus into the very heart of the new India in the making., Even though we have won political freedom the forces of evil are still prevalent in our country, for example communalism and oppression of the weaker sections of the society by the politically, socially and economically powerful. What should be the Cross in action in this context is the questions Gandhiji raises for us today. How can we identify with the suffering people in India to eliminate their suffering is the question Gandhiji raises for us today.

S.K. George affirmed that redemptive, suffering love is the central principle of Christianity and the manifestation of it in practice, and not the preaching of any dogma is what is needed, is what will convince India of the truth and the power of Christianity. He was of the firm conviction that the real Christ of India, stricken for the transgressions of her people, standing in with them against oppression and injustice, smitten of God and afflicted and of his travail bringing life and light to the nation has to find embodiment in the Indian Church. The Christian church relegated Jesus' Cross as impracticable idealism. Jesus' great enunciation of the law of love as the only rule of life for human person as a child of God has continually been given the go-by in Christian

practice. What really stands in the way of accepting the gospel of Jesus is the demand on our characters. The Sermon on the Mount has to work as a practical proposition in our lives. Where the Church has failed, Gandhian Satyagraha provides the practical implementation of Jesus' teaching.

For Mahatma Gandhi Jesus was a Supreme Satyagrahi. He was a teacher and exemplar of sacrificial love, It was the idea of sacrificial suffering in the life of Jesus that appealed most to Gandhiji, although he rejected traditional doctrines of atonement. The sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross was to him a supreme example of self-giving. He said: "One such act of perfect sacrifice would suffice for the whole world. Such is held to be Jesus' example". Christ for Gandhiji, taught and embodied a pure non-violence, ahimsa. He said: "Jesus was non-violence par excellence. Underlying non-violence is love and Jesus' life and death were an expression of pure divine love". "When I survey the wondrous Cross" was a favourite hymn for Gandhiji.

In S.K.George's view the Cross of Christ is the supreme, perfect historic example of aggressive love attacking evil in its stronghold; it is the supreme example of victory of love over evil. But, alas, Christianity has made of it a creed, a doctrine, belief in which is to secure a heaven of comfort and security. It is necessary to bring Cross back from the realm of creed and dogma and set it up again as a working principle of life, still mighty to overthrow entrenched evil and still possible to be lived out. George in this context indicated that the Christian preaching of forgiveness through the blood of Christ, though it sometimes produces emotional response on a mass scale as well as individual transformation, has of no avail to relieve the stranglehold of sin and evil of civilization. Christianity is unable to achieve the realization of a juster social order in terms of an atonement theory, rather it can be achieved only in terms of reconceiving the Cross of Christ as a working principle of conquering love overcoming evil everywhere and thus realizing God's kingdom on earth.

The Cross here simultaneously becomes the struggle and victory over principalities and powers over death and the evil on the one hand and the Divine identification with all people, specially with the struggles of the poor and the oppressed for their humanity on the other. Cross is the manifestation of Christ's victory over evil embedded in corporate and cosmic structures which are termed principalities and powers or demonic powers. Cross means that Christ has disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him (Col.2:15). The death of Jesus is seen as the struggle and victory over the princes of this world (Jn12:31). The Cross is calling the Church now to resist the idolatry of power and wealth and other gods of death in India's collective life; and also to be in solidarity with all people., specially with the poor and the oppressed in their struggle for justice. In the Cross of Jesus Christ we can see the divine self-giving for the sins of all humankind. But in a special way we can see in Christ's cross, the agony of God at the exploitation and inhumanity among humans and His/Her identification with the suffering of the oppressed sections in their struggle for liberation of their humanity. Jesus Christ is present and is agonizing in the people of India, specially in the down trodden Indian people. The Cross is the identification of God with the suffering of all people, specially of the poor and the oppressed, of the refugee and the disinherited, of the Negro, Dalit, Tribal and Woman and is therefore a source of hope for their liberation and their future. Where there is pain and human suffering, particularly amongst those who are most helpless against the social forces of our day, there is the deepest agony of God and thus the deepest consolation for us. God is on the side of the people, specially of the suffering people. Also we have to specially note here that in the Cross of Christ God is identifying not with Christians alone. Cross has no religious boundary. Cross has no creedal or racial boundary. Cross is non-communal. The redemptive suffering love of the Cross is for all people and for the whole creation. Cross stands for a new human community in which all barriers and distinctions are

broken down. A fellowship of the disciples of the Crucified Christ is a possibility here beyond religious barriers. Christ on the Cross overthrows evils of the world; identifies with the sufferings of all people; and is one with all humanity and the whole creation beyond communal-religious boundaries.

## **2) Cross is the total affirmation of God through the total self-sacrifice of Jesus.**

Cross implies Christ's total surrender to the will of God, the Father and Mother. The total sacrifice of Christ means the total affirmation of God. In faith, in love, in obedience, in hope, without reservation, without asking for anything in return, Jesus said, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit". That was the perfect sacrifice, not propitiatory, not appeasing an angry God, not gaining surplus merit for others, but a simple, faithful, loving act of self-immolation. This is sacrifice, the highest expression of love. One gives oneself (and not a substitute) to God who is all in love, in joy, in faith.

We the Indians can be proud of the fact Advaita Vedānta has provided a beautiful theological basis for this self-sacrifice of Jesus. The distinctiveness of Jesus when expounded from within Advaita can best be brought out by the negation of any distinctiveness. This is because the relevance of Jesus lies in his not claiming any uniqueness for himself; in his total sacrifice of himself for others. Jesus, like an individual being or the total creation in Advaita, has no separate reality for himself. His reality is totally derived from Brahman/Ātman, from God. His reality lies in sacrificing himself and finding his reality in Brahman. Jesus in particular form is unreal; he is real only in his own form which is the form of Being/God. Jesus is real insofar as he is of the nature of Being/God. Also, all empirical dealings of Jesus are real insofar as they are of the nature of Being/God. Jesus is only the manifestation of name and form that are latent in Ātman/Brahman/God into all the states by retaining their own nature as the Ātman and remaining indistinguishable from Brahman in time and space. The life

of Jesus, culminating in the Cross is the affirmation that all names and forms are modifications and are real by the Ātman who is Being and unreal by themselves. If we understand the organs of us or our representative Jesus or the objects of the world as the Supreme Lord that is māyā and we are under avidyā Ignorance. The Cross of Jesus proclaims that if we identify any aspect of his person as Brahman/God, we are in ignorance; but if we identify in every aspect of his person Brahman and Brahman alone, we have come to the experience who he truly is. Jesus in his person always affirmed the reality of God, Brahman through self-surrender and self-sacrifice and helps us to do the same. But the Christian church in its history has reversed this very often to affirm the reality of Jesus in the person of God and thus totally misinterpreted the meaning of Jesus. If that is so, Advaita Vedanta corrects the misinterpretation of the meaning of Jesus caused by the Christian Church by focusing on his self-sacrifice. The Advaitic Theological basis of the self-sacrifice of Jesus is: It is God/Being Himself/Herself who is perceived in a form other than His/Her own namely Jesus and hence we should not make any assumption of anything other than God/Being at my time or place. For those who know the real character of the rope and clay, the name and idea of serpent and jar cease and in the same manner for those who know the real character of God/Being, the name and idea of Jesus cease. Jesus sacrificed himself totally on the /cross and affirmed the reality of Being/God. We have to sacrifice ourselves as Jesus did to discover our reality in God/Being.

The Neo-Vedāntic interpretations of Christ provided by Swamiji's like Vivekananda, Abhedananda, Akhilananda, Satprakashananda and scholars like S. Radhakrishnan are important in this context. The insight which Jesus expresses through his historical life are considered by the Neo-Vedāntins as expressions of a timeless spiritual fact of mystic human perfection. The abandonment of the ego and the soul's arisal to a sense of its universality is interpreted as the meaning of the Cross. Cross is the expression of spiritual power or soul force through which

alone can we conquer evil. Cross symbolizes the conquest of the lower passions. Through his crucifixion, Jesus Christ teaches us to overcome the body-idea by the spiritual conquest of the flesh, to overcome the lower self by the higher spiritual self. And through resurrection Jesus Christ affirms that human person is really Spirit, death can take life out of the body, but it cannot affect the spiritual self of a person. Resurrection signifies changeless immortal life; it is the realization of the abiding presence of God in us attainable by all, through the crucifixion of the empirical selves. It is the passage from the death of self-absorption to the life of unselfish love, the transition from the darkness of selfish individualism to the light of universal spirit. According to the Neo-Vedāntins the resources of God which were available to Jesus are open to all and if we struggle as he did, we will develop the God in us. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are not so much historical events which occurred, once upon a time as universal processes of spiritual life, which are being continually accomplished in the souls of humans. The central lesson of the life of Jesus to the Hindu is the undermining of the false antithesis between human person and God. Christ shows us the way to become perfect; he shows us our true nature which is divine. Jesus shows us the way to the realization of our oneness with heavenly Father as expressed by his famous saying 'I and my Father are one'. Christhood is the supreme state of God-consciousness where all duality vanishes; each soul is a latent Christ. Our true nature is Spirit and sin is nothing but selfishness or ego-sense caused by the ignorance of this true nature, point out the Neo-Vedāntins.

Cross as sacrifice, giving rise to the atonement theories are meaningless in the context of Advaita Vedānta and neo-Vedānta. Sacrifice of Jesus Christ in other words has to be understood as self-sacrifice. The Neo-Vedāntins point out that human sacrifice was a Jewish idea and to fit the gentle and loving Jesus into Jewish beliefs, the idea of human sacrifice in the form of atonement or as a human scapegoat, by Christianity, was really unfortunate. Even Christian

theologians today do not find any of the atonement theories or the modern attempts to rehabilitate them – the conception of salvation as being brought about by Jesus' death as an atonement to God for human sin – as attractive or convincing. We should note that until Anselm (11<sup>th</sup>c) the metaphorical language of Mark 10.45, ransom (*lutron*), was taken by Christian theologians literally to mean that Jesus, by his death was paying ransom to the devil, in the context of taking original sin and Fall also literally. According to Anselm's satisfaction theory sin is disobedience to God and since the needed satisfaction is one which none but God can make and none but human person ought to make, it is necessary for the God-man to make it. As per the penal-substitutionary Theory of the reformers of the 16<sup>th</sup> c., Christ took our place in bearing the inexorable penalty for human sin and the accused is pronounced righteous here on account of the righteousness of Christ.

Going beyond these atonement theories, we are invited to experience Cross today as the total affirmation of God actualised through the total self-sacrifice of Jesus. Along with the total self-sacrifice of Jesus, through his grace and inspiration we are also to sacrifice ourselves. A total self-denial of ourselves is a total affirmation of God. It will also be an affirmation of the spiritual, universal side of human life; an affirmation of our higher spiritual self through the crucifixion of the empirical selves. It will be a passage to a life of unselfish live, to human perfection. This is done with the full awareness that we are nothingness, non-being, apart from God, who alone is Being; total surrendering of ourselves which is Cross is the affirmation of the Being, and simultaneously the affirmation of our spiritually transformed life as disciples of Jesus.

This is not to ignore the fact that we also experience the Cross of Christ as a working principle of redemptive suffering conquering love over-coming evil every where and such a Cross of Christ we are called to emulate. This is also not to ignore the fact that we experience the Cross of Christ as the agony of God at the exploitation and

inhumanity among humans and His/Her identification with the suffering of the oppressed in their struggle for liberation, which again is a valuable path for us to follow. This is also not to ignore the fact that we experience the Cross of Christ as God's identification with the whole humanity and the whole creation beyond all communal – religious boundaries as well, which we should also continue in our lives. But all these we experience and we emulate on the basis of our central experience and emulation of the Cross of Christ as a total affirmation of God through our total self-sacrifice. May God in Christ through the power of God's Spirit enable us to experience and emulate the Cross of Christ today and all the days to come.

## XII

# OUR INSPIRATION TO LOVE

*(Sermon at Bishop's College Chapel On 22.6.2005)*

The theme for our this morning's reflection and meditation is: God in Christ in our inspiration to love. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbours and hate your enemy'. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous" Matt.5.43-45.

The passage begins with an incomplete quotation from Lev.19.18 'you shall love your neighbours', leaving out the important part 'as yourself.' This is followed by the non-biblical words, "You shall hate your enemy", i.e., limiting our love in a narrow ethnocentric framework. The view to hate the enemy is not found verbatim in the Old Testament, but it may be in the Manual of Discipline of the Qumran community 1: 9-10. To quote: "And that they (the saints) may love all the Sons of light each according to his lot in the Council of God; and that they may hate all the Sons of darkness, each according to his fault in the vengeance of God." Hating the enemy may be hinted at in the Old Testament, for example Deu.7.2.

On retaliation and love of enemies in Biblical thinking, we may trace a five-stage evolution: First stage is, unlimited revenge (Gen.4.15,

24); second stage is limited revenge (Deut. 19. 16-21). Third stage is the silver rule, "Do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you" (Tobit 4.15). Forth state is the golden rule which is more positive than the silver rule: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you" (Matt.7.12). i.e., reaching out to do good, taking the initiative to create an atmosphere of good will. And the Fifth stage is loving one's enemies, an invitation to moral heroism and sanctity. This is the loftiest stage. There are Christian thinkers who consider only this last stage as proclaiming the legitimate rule of conduct for Christians. The earlier stages of code of conduct are abrogated in this last stage of code of conduct. But there are others who consider the earlier stages as represent a permanent resource for believers, when appropriate. It depends on the moral level of the opponent which level of biblical ethics should be employed.

"But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you'. This is considered by some as not hopeless idealism but a wise strategy for overcoming the persecutor. The heroic stance of the martyr is hard for governments to control and it gives the persecutor a bad image. A strategy for winning, through the wisdom of love, is involved here. If we love those who love us, our reward is an increase in their love. If we love those who hate us, our reward is an increase in God's love; our reward is the kingdom, a vision of God.

How can we love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us? The inspiration for this we receive from God in Christ. First of all we are called to experience God as love. Secondly we are called to experience Christ as loving his enemies and praying for those who persecuted him. And finally we are called to continue this attitude of God in Christ, of love, in our life, today and all the days to come. Let us reflect and meditate upon these three aspects one by one.

## **1. God is love**

God loves all, not only those who are striving to be good, but also who are basically evil. God makes his/her sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous, says

the passage of our reflection today. 1Jn.4.7ff has expounded God as love: “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us... God is love and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them... We love because he first loved us. Those who say, ‘I love God’ and hate their brothers or sisters are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also”. In 3.16 further confirms the love of God: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life”.

The expression ‘God is love’ has come at the end of decades of reflection and it attempts to encapsulate God’s caring, saving action in the gift of his/her Son. It was drawn from the experience of Jesus. It is the closest the New Testament comes to telling us about the “being” of God and it provides a starting point for a consideration of Biblical theology, specially Johannine theology. Let us seek God’s help to experience God as love, to experience the being of God.

## 2. Christ is love:

In 1 Jn. Jesus’ death is presented as a model for love. Jesus laid down his life for us and we have to follow his example. 1 Jn 3.16 says: “We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.” As per the gospel according to John 15.13 Jesus’ death is the highest model of friendship and Christians ought to be willing to show as much love for one another: “Greater

love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends”. Jesus in John 10.11 says: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep”; and verse 15 says “and I lay down my life for the sheep”.

To reveal a God of love to the world can be seen as the purpose of Jesus’ life and ministry. The earthly presence of the Son flows from the fact that God loved the world so much that he gave his Son so that the world might be saved, and that those who are in the world might have a chance for eternal life. The Son has been loved by God, his Father, from before all time. The love that has existed between the Father and the Son from all time has broken into history, as the Father, who loves the Son, has given all things into his hands. The Prologue of John tells us a unique union between the Logos and the God, which reached out into the darkness to bring an invincible light. A logical conclusion to this ‘story of God’ is that the presence of the Son in the world is a challenge to recognize in him the Father who has loved in this way. Jesus really loved his enemies. In the Cross he was the perfect example of forgiving love. He prayed: “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk.23.34). Let us seek God’s blessings to experience this forgiving love of Jesus.

### **3. We are called to be love as**

#### **God in Jesus is the manifestation of Love**

Like Jesus we are also called to love our enemies; we are called to be examples of forgiving love. The example of Jesus was followed in the Church for instance by the martyrs. Take the case of Stephen. Acts 7.59-60 read: “While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit”. Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them”. When he had said this, he died.” In 1 Jn. love is presented as the mark of God’s children and the message is that Christians must love one another. A person who loves his brothers and sisters abide in the light and in it there is no cause for stumbling. But a person who hates his/her brothers and sisters is in the darkness and walks in the darkness and does not

know where he/she is going, because the darkness has blinded his/her eyes (1 Jn. 2.10-11).

If love is the being of God and if love is the life of Jesus on earth, we cannot but be love as well. Ours is a derived being from the being of God as love and ours is a derived life from the life of Jesus as love. We may be imperfect and insignificant but God in Christ can transform us in the line of his love to be perfect and significant in loving all including our enemies. We are thus called to experience ourselves as love through the grace and initiative of God in Christ. We are called to experience that love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude; love does not insist on its own way. We are called to experience that love never ends, love is not irritable or resentful; love does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth, love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (1 Cor. 13. 4-8). Therefore let us pray to God today:

Loving God, hatred and enmity are part of our imperfect selves. Only you can change us in your Son. We very badly need a change, a change to love one and all, a change to love our enemies who persecute and oppress us. We believed that love can transform the world, love can transform humans. Instill in us drop by drop this wonderful power of love. We acknowledge that if we speak in the tongue of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, we are a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. We realize that if we have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if we have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, we are nothing. Also it is our knowledge that if we give away all our possessions, and if we hand over our bodies to be burned, but do not have love, we gain nothing (1 Cor.13.1-3). Loving God in Christ, through the power of your Spirit transform us to be instruments of your love today and all the days to come.

# XIII

## THE GRACE AND THE KINGDOM

*(Sermon at Bishop's College Chapel on 12/10/2005)*

“The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet”(Matt.22.8-9).

This parable of the Wedding Banquet which we get in Luke 14.15-24 as well, unfolds in three acts: (1) verses 2-7, two calls to the proper guests; (2) verses 8-10, a call to the outcasts; (3) verses 11-14, a sorting out at the wedding parting. Here the Kingdom of God is depicted in its aspect as the messianic banquet, derived from Isa 25.6-10: “On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all people a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear... Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken...” Here the servants or slaves sent to call the invited people are the prophets. An invitation is a free act of kindness; God is not obliged to invite. Everything is ready: The concept ‘ready, prepared’ occurs three times, twice in this passage and once in 5.8. It connotes extreme eschatological urgency; the dishes are hot. But the invited deny the urgency; they became careless with the things of God. Verses 6 and 7 are a hindrance to the

logic of the story. They represent an interpolation which historicizes the parable alluding to the Roman capture of Jerusalem in CE 70. Those originally invited were not worthy; they failed to show an appropriate moral and spiritual response. The servants were asked to go to the road outlets i.e., the main streets where the gates and markets of an oriental city situated. It is there we get the crowds. The people there are the outcasts of Israel, the tax collectors and people in despised trades. Invitation was extended to both the good and the bad. Sinners too are invited and the Church in history is a mixed body of saints and sinners. The wedding garment represents a converted life full of good deeds. Sinners are invited, but are expected to repent. The one without a wedding garment is treated very harshly only to make a distinction between the initial call of salvation and the perseverance to the last which is not automatic. Believers are thus warned against any complacency.

### **What is the relevance of this parable for us today?**

1. First of all we are called to reconceive the meaning of the Kingdom of God as an experience of God's future in our present. Though 'Kingdom' can have a dynamic meaning of 'rule' or 'reign' of God, it is not equivalent with divine sovereignty. Rather it answers to the great Old Testament expectation. What Jesus announces is the realization of Israel's hope, the fulfillment of the covenant promises made to the forefathers and foremothers. The new and final order at the end of history has arrived at last with Jesus as a banquet. It is in this sense that his Kingdom preaching is eschatological as well as simultaneously having a historical thrust. The Kingdom banquet is future as well as present, rather future in the present. The disciples of Jesus are blessed, because they have been granted an experiential knowledge of 'the secrets of the kingdom' as a present reality (Mtt. 13.11,16-17). The 'least' one presently in the kingdom is greater in this respect than John the Baptist (Mtt.11.11). The healing of the demon-possessed man (Mtt. 12.22-28) is evidence, not of Satan's

kingdom-power but that 'the kingdom of God has come upon you' as a wedding banquet. The redemptive character of the kingdom is emphasised here. The eschatological power of the Holy Spirit as the dynamic of the kingdom is emphasized here. Perhaps the present and future references in Jesus' message of the Kingdom has to be held in tension. The Kingdom promised in the Old Testament was inaugurated at the coming of Jesus, but awaits its consummation. Jesus in inaugurating God's Kingdom has revealed God's intentions for the world.

These include forgiveness of sin (Lk.7.48-50), the conquest of evil, suffering and death (Mtt.12.28-29; Lk.4.18-21; Mtt. 11.5; Jn.11), the bringing of a new order of things which overturns common assumptions about power in society and the value of people (Lk 6.20 ff; 13.30) But while there is real evidence of the kingdom's power at work in individuals and communities embodying such goals and values, the kingdom's coming remains incomplete. The wedding banquet has just started. Because Christ's first coming has already inaugurated his kingdom, eternal life is experienced by the disciples during the present life (Jn. 3.36; 5.24; 1 Jn. 5.13; 2 Cor. 4. 7-18). Since eternal life means 'the life of the age to come' it implies not only everlastingness but a quality of life derived from relationship with Christ (Rom.6.23; Jn.17.3). Thus the perfect life of God's ultimate Kingdom is the consummation of the life in 'Christ', the Wedding Banquet, experienced now. Such meanings of God's future we are invited to experience in our present and that is the inner meaning of the parable of the banquet.

2. We are called to experience that God's gracious Invitation is open to all, especially to the outcasts, the tax collectors and people in despised trades.

The parable of the Wedding Banquet further teaches us its relevance that invitation to God's Kingdom is for all people. There is absolutely no barrier whatsoever. But there is the danger of the invited becoming careless regarding the invitation, regarding the things of

God. In which case those invited will lose their invitation and God will surely invite others, people from the streets to the Wedding Banquet. The invitation is not based on our merit; rather it is a free gracious act from the side of God. A totally gracious God is revealed to us in Jesus through this parable of the Wedding Banquet. Grace in the New Testament means the divine forgiveness of sins constituting the new creation, and it also means the power of God communicated to those who enter upon the new life of faith, hope and love. Paul says, we “are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom.3.24), where grace is the quality and power of the divine action which redeems human beings from sin. Paul also speaks of grace as the continuing action of God which enables the faithful to live the new life. “God is able to provide you with every blessing” i.e., grace, in abundance (2 Cor.9.8). The central meaning of grace remains always the mercy and forgiveness of God given freely to sinners along with the empowerment to meet the demands of the new life, and to resist temptation. The power of grace always remains God’s power but it becomes operative in humans and thus fulfills, sustains, and renews human nature. In the biblical view all God’s action is ultimately gracious, for it expresses his love toward the world. Hence there is an inevitable extension of the use of the term “grace” to cover all the divine action from creation to last things. In this context it is appropriate to note that the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches scheduled in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 12-24 February 2006, has its theme for discussion ‘God, in Your grace, Transform the World.’ Transformation of us and the world are absolutely through the grace of God.

It is also appropriate to remember that the grace of the Mother, the grace of the Mother Goddess is special with us in Bengal these days: Ma Durga has come to be with us these days during these Puja days. She is grace personified. In her grace she eliminates evil from the world and from us and establishes goodness every where. Durga, the goddess of power, the primordial Śakti, represented as ten-armed

(*daśa-bhuja*), mounted on a lion (*simha-vāhinī*), engaged in a deadly fight against the buffalo-shaped demon Mahiṣa, is also called Caṇḍī, and her exploits, as told in the Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa are sung every year at this time of Durga Puja. God's grace reaches out to all aspects of our personality, to all the levels of the created universe.

The challenge is before us to experience the kingdom values as God's future in our present. We are called to experience the good news that the new and final order at the end of history has arrived at last with Jesus as a banquet. Let us experience the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom as a present reality; let us experience the redemptive character of the kingdom; let us experience the eschatological power of the Holy Spirit as the dynamic of the kingdom. Let us experience the coming of a new order of things where there is the conquest of evil, suffering and death, where there is eternal life which implies a quality of life derived from relationship with Christ. Also the challenge is before us to experience the grace of God which is open to all, specially to the outcasts and the oppressed. The challenge is before us to experience the divine forgiveness constituting the new creation. The challenge is before us to experience redemption where grace is the quality and power of the divine action that redeems and empowers to meet the demands of life. And about all we are called to understand and experience God's grace that fulfills, sustains and renews human nature. May God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit enable us to experience the kingdom of God and the grace of God today and in all the day to come.

## XIV

# TRANSFORMATION: AN EASTERN CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

*(Address to the Youth Deligates of the Syrian Orthodox  
outside Kerala Diocese, in Kolkota on 1/11/2005).*

**T**ransformation of human life as well as the transformation of the whole creation is conceived in Eastern Christian thought in terms of an Apophatic theology, Deification, Eucharistic Worship and Jesus Prayer. We shall look into these four aspects briefly in this presentation.

### **1. Energy–Essence Distinction in God and the Importance of an Apophatic Theology.**

There are two possible theological ways namely that of cataphatic or positive theology, which proceeds by affirmations, and that of apophatic theology, which proceeds by negations. The only way, which is fitting with regard to God who by His/Her very nature is unknowable, is the apophatic way. It is by unknowing (*agnwsia*) that one may know God. As Dionysius the Areopagite notes, it is by ceasing to see or to know that we may learn to know that which is beyond all perception and understanding. The goal of apophatic theology is deification and this is compared by Dionysius and before him, the Cappadocian Fathers to Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai to meet with God. According to Gregory of Nazianzus the veil of darkness, which

hinders the vision of God's nature, has a salutary function. The rock, which hides Moses' complete vision of God and thus saves him from a fatal exposure to a total vision of God, is Christ. Christ is the saving curtain, which covers the window of any rational comprehension of God. God can only be worshipped and cannot be made the object of any theological discovery. God is understood as a Mystery i.e., something that is revealed for our understanding, but which we never understand exhaustively. Theology is not 'God-management', but a contemplation of the mysteries of revelation. There is no theology apart from experience.

Here we should bear in mind that Eastern Christian tradition draws a distinction between the essence, nature or inner being of God, on the one hand, and His/Her energies, operations or acts of grace, life and power, on the other. Eastern spirituality, liturgy and thought always affirmed the possibility of communion with God, accessible to every Christian in the life of the Church. But this accessibility does not include the very essence of God. According to Gregory of Nyssa, in speaking of God, when there is question of His/Her essence, that is the time to keep silence and when it is a question of His/Her operation, a knowledge of which can come down even to us, that is the time to speak of His/Her omnipotence by telling of His/Her works and to use words to this extent. According to Doinysius the Areopagite, in His/Her transsubstantial existence, through His/Her own principle or property, though God is unknowable and inscrutable, this does not mean that God is far removed from the world; rather God abides in the world in His/Her creative emanations and beneficial providences, in His/Her powers and energies. The essence-energy distinction in God does not imply a division or separation. The essence signifies the whole God as He/She is in Himself/Herself and the energies signify the whole God as He/She is in action. Wholly unknowable in His/Her essence, God wholly reveals Himself/Herself in His/Her energies. But this in no way divides His/Her nature into two parts as knowable and unknowable, rather only signifies two different modes of the divine existence namely in the essence and outside of the essence.

## 2. Deification: The Goal of Eastern Christian Spirituality

The goal of Eastern Christian spirituality is not the vision of the essence of God, but a participation in the divine life of the Holy Trinity; the deified state of the co-heirs of the divine nature, gods created after the uncreated God, possessing by grace all that the Holy Trinity possesses by nature. The patristic tradition stands for a God-centered humanism where deification does not suppress humanity but makes human person truly human.

The doctrinal basis of human person's deification is to be found in the hypostatic unity between the divine and the human natures in Christ. Enhypostasized in the *Logos*, Christ's humanity, in virtue of the 'communication of idioms', is penetrated with divine 'energy'. It is, therefore, a deified humanity, which, however, does not in any way lose its human characteristics. In this deified humanity of Christ, human person is called to participate, and to share in its deification. This is the meaning of sacramental life and the basis of Christian spirituality. In Jesus there is a 'communication' of the divine energy with human nature because the man Jesus is God hypostatically. Those who are 'in Christ' share this communication, but with a difference. They are only human hypostases and consequently they are united to God, not hypostatically, but only 'by grace' or 'by energy'. Eastern Christian thought in general conceives salvation as deification. The East does not think about salvation in terms of the individual soul returning to its Maker. It is visualized rather as a gradual process of transfiguration of the whole world, culminating in the deification in Christ of the members of the Church as representatives of the entire creation.

It is the Holy Spirit who recreates our nature by purifying it and uniting it to the body of Christ. He/She also bestows deity i.e., the common energy of the Holy Trinity which is divine grace, upon human persons. The path which Christ took was that of a descent towards created being and taking upon himself of our nature. If that is so the path of created persons has to be that of ascent towards the divine nature by means of union with uncreated grace communicated by the

Holy Spirit. Human person participates in the energies of God, not in the essence and therefore although 'oned' with the divine, human person still remains human person. The energies are God as He/She communicates Himself/Herself in outgoing love. He/She who participates in God's energies is therefore meeting God Himself/Herself face to face, through a direct and personal union of love, in so far as a created being is capable of this. Human person while certainly a creature and, as such, external to God, is conceived in his/her very nature as being fully himself/herself only when he/she is in communion with God, is in the process of deification.

As per the Eastern Christian thought the union to which we are called is neither hypostatic as in the case of the human nature of Christ, nor substantial, as in that of the three divine Persons. Rather it is a union with God in His/Her energies, or union by grace making us participate in the divine nature, without our essence becoming thereby the essence of God. In deification we are by grace or energies all that God is by nature, save only identity of nature. We remain creature while becoming God by grace, as Christ remained God in becoming human person by the Incarnation.

An aspect of the divine energies is that of the uncreated light in which God reveals and communicates Himself/Herself to those who enter into union with Him/Her. This light may be defined as the visible quality of the divinity, of the energies or grace in which God makes Himself/Herself known. This light reveals itself to the whole human person. It fills the intellect and the senses and at the same time surpasses them. Eastern saints have very frequently been transfigured by this light and have appeared resplendent, like Christ on the mount of Transfiguration.

### **3. The Significance of Eastern Worship centered on the Eucharist**

Our transformation is through the worship of God. Eastern liturgy is the passage from this world into the world to come; it is a procession

and ascension to the Kingdom. Worship is an act of the whole body of Christ as the whole divine-human community. We are worshipping with the total community in space and time as well as with the heavenly community. History and eschatology and all generations, as well as all races and people, have to be borne in consciousness in authentic worship. In Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ we along with these enter into the presence of God the parent and worship Him/Her.

The whole human person is involved in Eastern worship, not merely the ear and the brain. All the five senses are provided enough participation. Also, music, colour and smell as well as gestures and actions are used to express the non-rational element in worship. Eucharistic worship of the Eastern Church occurs when the Spirit transports us into the presence of the heavenly throne. There we stand face to face with God worshipping Him/Her. Eucharistic worship is an end in itself, an act of freedom, love and joy. It seeks for nothing beyond the Holy Trinity to whom the offering is made. The dominant mood of Eastern worship is self-sacrifice, being caught up in the once-for-all and eternal sacrifice of Christ. The normative event set forth through the rituals of the celebration of the Holy Qurbono has a double aspect – a Jesus-centered aspect and a people-centered aspect. From the Christo-centric perspective, the Holy Qurbono sets forth the life and mission of Jesus as the very God, Saviour and Judge of Creation. From the perspective of the people, it prepares the believing community to offer itself as a living sacrifice. i.e., to carry the cross whenever and wherever necessary. Through the celebration, the cultic community declares its will to let its body be broken and blood be shed as an imitation of the self-offering of its God Jesus. Therefore worship is not a means to achieve ‘blessings and provisions for our earthly pilgrimage’; nor is it ancillary to mission or part of mission. Our offering in the Eucharist is not merely the two elements but the whole world as well as our whole life in all its dimensions.

The essence-energy distinction is well maintained in the Eastern theology of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is Christ’s transfigured, life-

giving, but still human, body, enhypostasized in the Logos and penetrated with divine energies. In the Eucharist we participate in the glorified humanity of Christ, which is not the 'essence of God'. Therefore for the Eastern thought as opposed to the Western thought a term like 'transubstantiation (*metousiosis*)' is improper to designate the Eucharistic mystery. The Eucharist is neither a symbol to be 'contemplated' from outside nor an 'essence' distinct from humanity, but Jesus Himself, the risen Lord, made known through the breaking of the bread (Lk. 24. 35). No further speculation is made in the Orthodox tradition beyond this realistic and salvation-oriented affirmation of the Eucharistic presence as that of the glorified humanity of Christ. Also, Christ is not shown in the Holy Gifts, rather He is given, vision of Christ is offered through icons.

Here we should remember that in the East the sacraments are understood as the aspects of a unique mystery of the Church, in which God shares divine life with humanity, redeeming humans from sin and death and bestowing upon them the glory of immortality. Through the sacraments we are able to enter into the secret council of God to receive His/Her light and life. They are not understood as isolated acts through which a 'particular' grace is bestowed upon individuals by properly appointed ministers acting with the proper intention, as is done by the Western Church. The sacrament is the anticipatory realization of the transfiguration. It is the regeneration of all creation. In the sacrament the creation is delivered from its divided and alienated state and is established in its trans-fallen state in the kingdom of God. In the sacrament it is always God who acts and the individuals do nothing; they are in kenotic self-sacrifice and thus the sacrament is a free 'breaking in' of divine energy into cosmic life. The only thing perhaps further needed is, the principle of catholicity or all-togetherness, which is theocentric in nature expressed in the sacraments, has to be translated into practice to effect socio-economic liberation as well as justice, freedom and unity.

#### 4. The Importance of Jesus Prayer

The 19<sup>th</sup> c. Russian Pilgrim was able to practise Jesus prayer successfully and he has suggested many practical steps. His first practical step was to find the place of the heart according to the directions of the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> c. Simon the New Theologian. He closed his eyes and imagined looking into his heart, his desire was to visualize the heart in the left breast and to listen attentively to its beating. At first he was occupied like this for half an hour several times a day. At the beginning he was not aware of anything but darkness; and then slowly the heart appeared and he noticed its movement. Then he began to say the Jesus Prayer inwardly to the rhythm of his breathing according to the directions of St. Gregory of Sinai and of Callistus and Ignatius. That is, while looking into the heart and inhaling he said, 'Lord Jesus Christ', and while exhaling, 'have mercy on me'. At first he did this for an hour or two, and then he increased it so that in the end he spent practically the entire day in this exercise.

After three weeks he began to feel pain in the heart, then a very pleasant warmth, delight and peace. This encouraged him to even more earnest practice of the Prayer, so that all his thoughts were now directed to this and he experienced great joys. From this time, periodically, he began to experience various feelings and perceptions in his heart and mind. Sometimes he felt a sweet burning in his heart and such ease, freedom, and consolation that he seemed to be transformed and caught up in ecstasy. Sometimes he experienced a burning love toward Jesus Christ and all of God's creation. Sometimes he shed joyful tears in thanks giving to God for His/Her mercy to him, a sinner. Sometimes difficult concepts became crystal clear and new ideas came to him which of himself he could not have imagined. Sometimes the warmth of the heart overflowed throughout his being and with tenderness he experienced God's presence within him. Sometimes he felt great joy in calling on the name of Jesus Christ and he realized the meaning of the words, 'the Kingdom of God is within you' (Luke 17. 21). The self-activating prayer of the heart was his

consolation wherever he found himself or whatever he was doing. It did not distract him from anything and nothing seemed to diminish it. If he had something to do, the Prayer followed in him and the action was done more quickly; if he attentively listened to something or read, the Prayer did not cease and he simultaneously felt the one and the other, almost as if there were two of him or as if he had two souls in his body.

Stillness or inward silence is known in Greek as *hesychia* and it is through the Jesus Prayer that one attains the inner silence. Hesychasm is not just emptiness or absence of mental or emotional activity. Out of the depth of silence emerges the figure of the self-emptying saint who creates a presence and radiates an energy by his /her very being. Although the hesychasts do not engage in direct activity in the world, they are full of compassion for others. *Hesychia* assumes the hidden role of roots that invisibly support and sustain the superstructure of Christian life. In Eastern patristic view evil is the absence of goodness and compassionate prayer can eliminate evil as light can eliminate darkness. Jesus prayer grows from the prayer of the lips, to the prayer of the mind to the prayer of the mind in the heart. It is not an end in itself but only a means for preparing the person to receive the deifying grace of God. Also, according to the Fathers this prayer can be said either in full i.e., 'Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me, a sinner' or in shorter versions namely as 'Jesus, Son of God, have mercy upon me' or as 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me'.

Thus we could note above that we can know God not in His/Her essence, but only in His/Her energies and this experience transforms us. In the deified humanity of Jesus Christ, human person is called to participate, and share in its deification and that is the path for transformation. In the Eucharist we participate in the glorified humanity of Christ. The worship and sacraments regenerate and transfigure us. Jesus Prayer helps us to attain the inner silence; it prepares us to receive the deifying grace of God.

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